

# TAORMINA



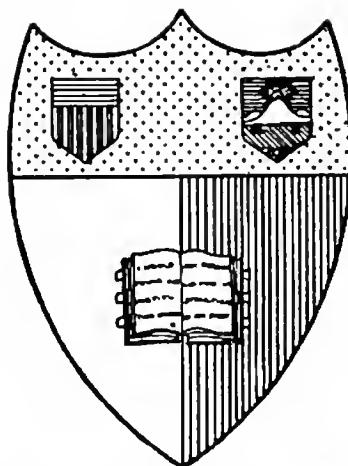
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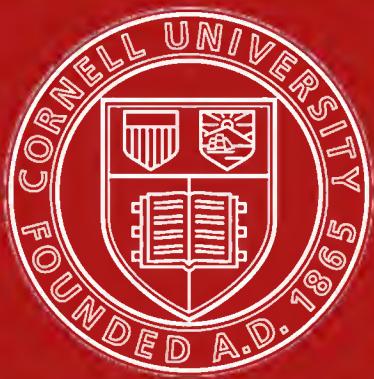
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# TAORMINA

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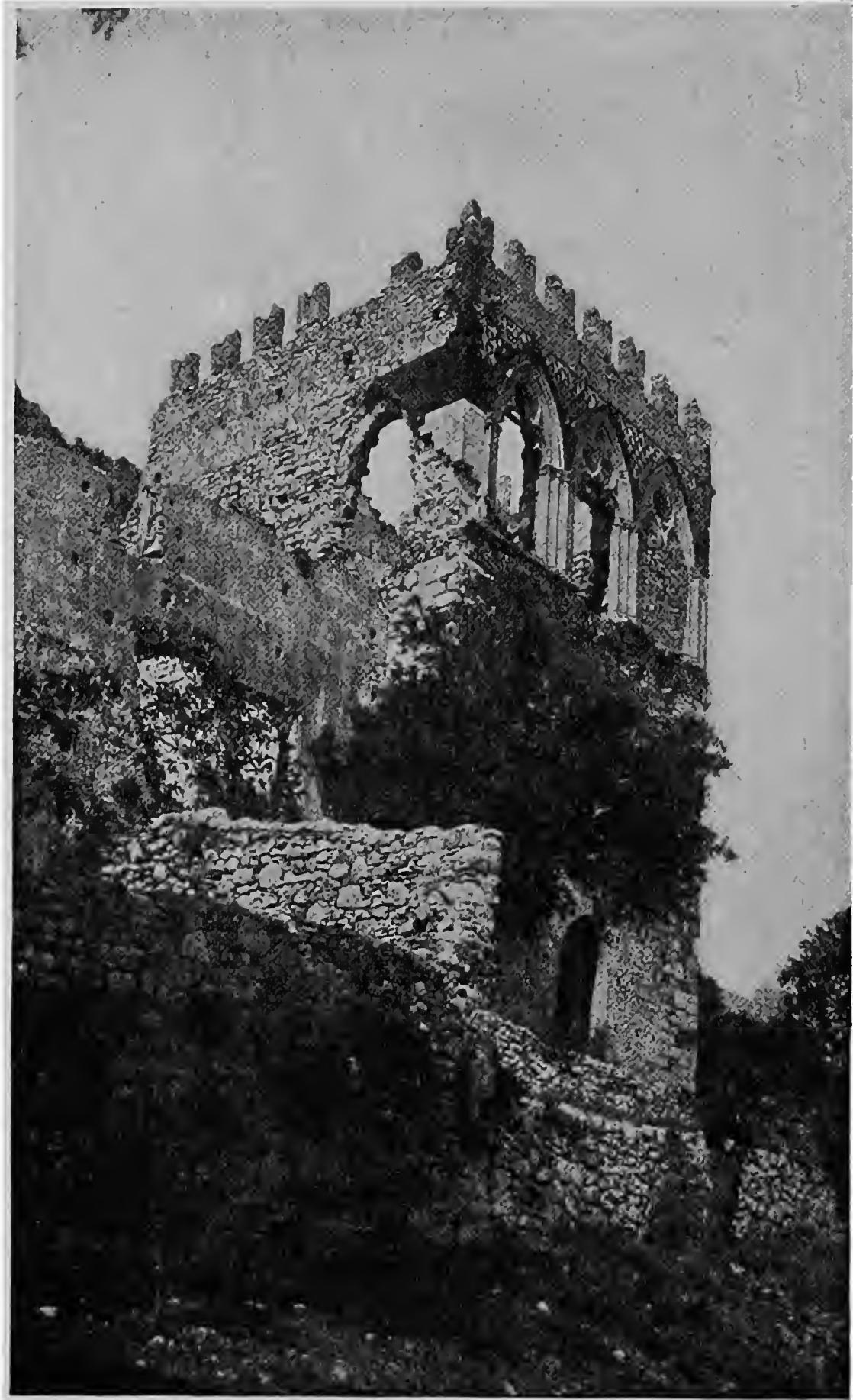
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BADA VECCHIA

# TAORMINA

BY

# RALCY HUSTED BELL

How many, once lauded in song, are given over to the forgotten; and how many who sung their praises are clean gone long ago.

—*Marcus Aurelius.*



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TO THE ONE  
AT WHOSE SUGGESTION  
**TAORMINA**  
WAS  
WRITTEN



## TAORMINA

With warmest grays on roof and wall

The town is rich in winey tone —

The very hill-tops, one and all,

Seem made of semiprecious stone.

The paths that climb and ways that fall

'Tween olive trees and lemon groves

At morn and eve are musical

With goatherds piping to their droves.

Fair Etna waves her plume of pearl

Against an opalescent blue,

In the shining robes of a sinless girl,

Necklaced with jewels of frozen dew.

Upon the middle of the day

The light falls golden from the sky ;

While 'neath the arches shadows play

With purple dreams as moments fly.

## *Taormina*

In every crannied wall there grows,  
Framed with softened tints of old,  
Some fairy flower, some vagrant rose,  
'Mid splash of green or leaves of gold.

Sheltering walls hide terrace-plots,  
Where modest gardens dream and hold  
The dews of eve in flower-pots,  
On ruined shafts of classic mould —

Little gardens half aswoon  
With their own loveliness, and smiles  
That fall like rain from ardent noon,  
And drip like rain from fluted tiles.

And creeping streets like ribbon-bands,  
Crinkled, and crawling up and down  
From castled crests and bold headlands  
To winding courses through the town.

And smiling ruins greet the eye  
With vibrant tones of glory fled —  
Where Beauty's tattered garlands lie  
Still coronal upon her head.

Slow-crumbling tower and broken walls  
Close-clinging where the cliffs are steep ;

## **Taormina**

And where the silvery moonlight falls —  
And while the liquid shadows sleep.

And far below, blue waters lave  
The very shores Greek fathers saw  
When unto all the world they gave  
The glories of their art and law.

And this is Taormina — this  
The spot by Attic poets trod,  
And made immortal by the kiss  
Of Beauty — which to me is God.



## **PREFATORY NOTE**



## NOTE

IF anything may be said to be *accidental* in this world of law and general disorder, *Taormina*, surely, may lay claim to the term.

In February, 1913, a certain artist and I boarded steamer for Italy. Our purpose was to paint, and to finish a book on Art which we had undertaken together; but, besides a change of scene, our leading desire was for a period of repose, which is ever the delusion of travel.

We planned to stay six weeks or so on the Island of Sicily. Mr. Artist was then to return to his studio at home. I was to venture the different whirlpools of strife raging in the Levant.

We landed at Messina about the middle of March, and went directly to Taormina. A few days after our arrival I was stricken with an illness which nearly proved fatal. Consequently our literary

## *Note*

work together was interrupted. Mr. Artist painted for the most part alone. I was cared for at my villa — “Riposo” — by the Franciscan Nuns under the direction of Dr. Salvatore Cacciola Cartella — who was indeed both brother and doctor; and several other very pleasant persons ministered graciously to my every need and more.

It was during my convalescence that the beauty of Taormina so appealed to me that I felt impelled to make some sketches; and its charm penetrated so deeply into my being that I could not help writing about it. As I grew stronger, I went about gathering such antiques as I could lay hands on — among others, some fine Greek and Roman signets of engraved stone. Such, briefly, is the accidental genesis of *Taormina*.

In the spelling of proper names, I have not thought it advisable to follow a fixed rule. Those names most generally known

## *Note*

in the Latin spelling are given in the Latin. The same method was applied to those of Sicilian, Greek and English spelling.

It only remains for me to acknowledge my indebtedness for much general and no little specific information to Sister Mary of the Sanctuary, Mother Superior in the Taorminian Convent of Franciscan Nuns, affectionately known as the “White Sisters” on account of their dress. I have had the opportunity of consulting a rare old MS. lent to me by Sister Mary. I take this opportunity to thank her.

I will add that this tender and cultured woman has probably done more for the poor of Taormina during the past six or seven years, than any other one person ever did. Her nuns are truly good angels to the wee waifs of poverty, and as well to all victims of misfortune within their reach and power to help. Whom the children love all men may trust.



# **AVANT-PROPOS**



## AVANT-PROPOS

WHAT is the destiny of a soul, of a town, of a star? What is the birth of a babe, the death of an old man, the light of a sun gone out? Is destiny a force or an effect; and birth, is it a development of which death is the measure, full and struck off even with the brim? We know not.

There was a time when Fate was terribly in earnest shaping the awful destiny of this town; and, strange as it may seem, that was the period of its bloom — the springtime of its beauty. One may well inquire of the gods: “Does the Soul only flower on nights of storm?”

In those far-off days, on those stormy nights, Fate sat on the hills and ruled unquestioned. To-day we should impudently interrogate the gods; but their seats are empty as very soon all thrones shall be. We challenge the tombs without raising a single ghost. We read the

## *Avant-Propos*

stars differently now than did their former underlings. And we seem to have forgotten what once we knew: how strong is the dead hand of sorrow on the throat of the living joy. That, maybe, is what we mean by “the icy hand of destiny.”

Sorrows aplenty have visited this City on the Hill. But were they sorrows of the Soul, or only a physical sadness? Whence came they; and to what abyss have they led? We only know that where were upheavals of passion, now yawns merely a chasm which reveals nothing of to-morrow. To-day, the tragedies of yesterday are but the indirect memories of a dream. The currents of love and hatred have done their best and worst for Taormina. Storm and flood are past — we have not sounded their beginning nor fathomed their end. The present is too full of “the pain of living” to perceive the renaissance of sentiment that shall reclothe these Sicilian hills with glory.

# **ORIGIN EARLY INHABITANTS**



# TAORMINA

## *Origin Early Inhabitants*

FAR back in the mists of legend — beyond the range of history — Taormina shimmers in the glow of song colored with fable. The settlement smiles to us through distortive days of the far past. Then as she emerges into the clearer light of recorded time, we are able to see her peculiar beauty.

Her garments, it is true, have been torn by irreverent hands, and splashed with innocent blood. She has been sunburned and star-kissed, rain-beaten and wind-blown for ages. Yet time, that ruins all things, has only softened some of her harder colors into most alluring tints.

So ancient is this town, or so immediate

## *Origin*

our scale of perception, that we are used to speak of its beauty as immortal. Nor is this figure of speech far wrong. For if there be immortality of individual beauty, we may thus speak justly of something that since prehistoric times has taken root in the “eternal hills”—something that has blossomed down the ages as effectively as sun and rain have kissed Sicilian slopes into rare harmonies of color.

To know precisely how old Taormina is would be interesting; and to know something definite of its primitive inhabitants would enlarge our scope of history; but such cold knowledge could serve no high purpose in this sunny land. The iridescent glamor of invention, in all such instances, is as useful as fact, so long as we regard it merely as the halo of imagination, and not as the pure light of truth.

The origin of this city has been made enchanting by fables of the Greek poets; and

## *Early Inhabitants*

the Latin singers have enveloped its primitive inhabitants with the beauty of mystery. Romance rifles the past of its cold tones and disagreeable grays. The lyric impulse riots in color and dotes on throwing shafts of gold and showers of purple over the left shoulder of time. If it were not so, then human consciousness would be merely a white island flying through a black sea.

Time ruins all things and beautifies all things and recreates all things. Time is the real Artist. Purposeless he works — aimlessly he demolishes — and without design he creates. And yet, I am not so sure of the lack of design in anything. However, proportionately as time withdraws a subject from our present needs and immediate sympathies, the subject becomes beautified in our sight.

It is not essential to the sense of beauty that we should trace anything back to its source; indeed, it might be fatal to that

## *Origin*

feeling to make the attempt. The joyous contemplation of a forest stream is not ordinarily intensified by seeking its source. It might be pleasant to follow it upstream, but quite likely it would prove to be a painful and wearisome task before one reached the head. So it is with the acts of life. The enveloping mystery of their source is often merciful, and it usually adds a charm. A fine city and a beautiful woman! I wonder if it is always well to scrutinize their past — and is it ever polite?

The origin of Taormina is incidental. Her founders are dim, decorative figures in romantic history. To try to put them into a real world would be as stupid as impossible. It is of no more human importance, for instance, whether Charybdis was stolen by Jupiter near this town, than whether George Washington in his youth threw a silver coin across the Potomac. Even more, it matters not now whether

## *Early Inhabitants*

either were real persons in the flesh, since both have become *unreal* — ideal — personages in tradition. Through the mists of imagination — through the fogs of fame — no personage ever retains his true character very long. No matter how steadily it looms, it is sure to change face with a sort of periodic rhythm which seems to be one of the governing laws of fame.

Thus all those leisurely mortals, who are given to the reading of Silenus, will find as much pleasure in his verses as though Jupiter loved with human passion, and Charybdis lived the actual life of a flesh-and-curve woman.

“Quanti dall’ alte taorminesi roccie  
Miran nel sottostante mar Caribdi,  
Che, col fiero ingojare di uno aperto  
Vortice, assorbe le sbattute navi;  
Tostamente dai marini abissi  
Altissime le vibra in sino agli astri.”

How many from the huge rocks of Taormina  
Look down in the sea at Caribdi,

## *Origin*

Who, with a tremendous engulfing of an open  
Whirlpool, absorbs the tossed ships ;  
Soon after from the abyss of the sea  
Hurls them very high, as far as the stars.

*Second Punic War, Bk. IV.*

The same applies to Ovid's lines. Ceres is forever seeking the lost Proserpine — still “sighing from town to town beginning with Taormina.” The bereaved mother has taken up her being in the changeless world of Keats' *Grecian Urn*. In that world she will ever mourn the gloomy Pluto's boldness whilst her radiant daughter was so innocently plucking flowers. Ceaselessly she makes her rounds, visiting

“Great Imera and horrid Solina,  
Agrigento and steep Taormina,”

according to *Fasti*, in *Bk. IV.*

All these fancies are as good as facts. Indeed, they are facts of a kind in a world which we all know very well. As too much imitation kills the art of a pictorial

## *Early Inhabitants*

landscape, so also may it mutilate the charm of letters.

And so, while the origin of Taormina is of no consequence to those who visit the place for its beauty, or to ruminiate over ruins which have historic interest, it may be well, nevertheless, to correct some errors which have been widely copied by those who have written on the subject. Even the well known M. le Cte. De Forbin, who published his *Souvenirs de La Sicile* in 1823, was in some instances no more accurate in his data than complimentary in his remarks on Taormina. Beginning on page 191, he says:

“Taormine, *Tauromenium*, fut bâtie sur le penchant du mont *Taurus* par Andromaque, père de Timée l'historien ; elle fut peuplée de ceux des habitans de *Naxos* qui purent échapper lorsque Denys le tyran fit détruire leur ville. Agathocle s'en rendit maître ; Auguste y fonda une colonie romaine. Brûlée en 893 par les Sarrasins, elle fut détruite en 968 par ordre du calife Al-Moëz. Les restes de sa splendeur

## *Origin*

s'évanouirent; à peine y compte-t-on aujourd'hui quatre mille habitans. Taormine est, comme toutes les petites villes de la Sicile, sale, mal pavée, avec des rues si étroites, que deux personnes peuvent à peine y passer de front. Cette ville a toujours été un point militaire important; aussi trouve-t-on à chaque pas des ruines grecques, des murs romains, des tours sarrasines: les *opuntia*, les ronces, le lierre, se sont emparés de ces vains travaux; des pins et des palmiers règnent sur ces décombres, et pyramident au-dessus d'eux avec une grâce inimitable (a).

“Une inscription taillée sur la corniche d'une maison construite dans le style florentin et la plus apparente de Taormine peut faire croire qu'elle fut habitée par Jean d'Aragon, après que son armée eût été défait par les Français.

“On trouve aussi dans une église située sur la place de Taormine plusieurs inscriptions grecques; entre autres, celle-ci:

“ΟΔΑΜΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΤΑΙΡΟΜΕΝΙΤΑΝ  
ΟΛΥΜΠΙΝ ΟΛΥΜΠΙΟΣ ΜΕΣΤΟΝ  
ΝΙΚΑΣΑΝΤΑ ΠΥΘΙΑ ΚΕΛΗΤΙ  
ΤΕΛΕΙΟΙ.

“(a) On montre à Taormine un mur que l'on dit avoir appartenu à une naumachie, et une

## *Early Inhabitants*

citerne dans le genre de la *piscina mirabile*. Tout cela est fort dégradé. D'ailleurs, encore une fois, à quoi bon une naumachie et des combats sur l'eau dans un petit espace, chez un peuple qui habite le rivage de la mer?"

---

Taormina, *Tauromenium*, was built on the slope of *Mount Taurus* by Andromache, father of Timeo, the historian; it was settled by those of the inhabitants of *Naxos* who were able to escape when Dionysius, the tyrant, destroyed their city. Agothocle conquered it. Augustus founded there a Roman colony. Burned in 893 by the Saracens, it was destroyed in 968 by order of the Calif Al-Moëz. The remains of its splendor vanished; to-day scarcely four thousand inhabitants are left. Taormina is, like all the little cities of Sicily, dirty, badly paved, with streets so narrow that two persons can hardly walk abreast. This city has always been an important military post, hence one finds at each step Greek ruins, Roman walls, and Saracen towers: the *apuntia*,\* brambles and ivy, have taken possession of these useless works; pines and palm trees reign on these remnants and pyramid above them with inimitable grace (a). An inscription cut on the cornice

\* The apuntian growths, prickly pear.

## *Origin*

of a house constructed in the Florentine style and which is the most conspicuous in Taormina leads one to believe that it was inhabited by John of Aragon after his army had been defeated by the French.

There are also to be found in a church situated on the public square in Taormina various Greek inscriptions ; among which, is the following :

The People Of Tauromenion (crown)  
Olympis Mestos, Son Of Olympis, Who Was  
Victor In The Pythian Games With a  
Running Horse of Full Age.\*

(a) There is shown at Taormina a wall which is said to have belonged to a place for naval battles, and a cistern in the style of the *miraculous pool*. All that is very much dilapidated. Besides, once more, what would be the object of having a place for naval combats and for having combats on water in a little place, among a people inhabiting the sea-shore?

Many authors besides De Forbin have fallen, one after another, into error as to

\* This inscription with its translation may be found in Vol. XIV of the *Inscriptiones Græcæ*, No. 434, p. 114.

## *Early Inhabitants*

Taormina's origin. Nothing, indeed, perpetuates mistakes better than books. One copies another with absurd fidelity and blind confidence. The maker of one book seems to believe that the maker of another was as careful of his data as he is careless of his.

Tommasso Fazzello was one of the earliest authors to state that Taormina was founded by the Greek refugees when Naxos was destroyed by the tyrant Dionysius, the Younger. Perhaps he was the first author of any note to make this mistake. Antiquarian students know, however, from the study of ruins, and otherwise, that Taormina was already old when that massacre occurred. And besides, according to Diodorus:

“While these things were taking place, Andromache of Taormina, father of the great historian Timeo, assembled the remaining exiles of Nasso and received them on *Mount Tauro*, which is over Nasso. After having

## *Origin*

been there some time, the place of their dwelling was called Taormina.”

Now the exiles, who swelled the town and felt the value of security, built new walls around it, and called it Taormina. But greatly preceding this event,

“The Siculi had inhabited this mountain (of Tauro) in great numbers, yet without any chosen chief, long before Dionysius gave them the territory of Nasso.”

*Diodorus, Hist. Bk. IV.*

The Siculi, Thucydides tells us, came over-sea in ships, settled the island, and called it *Sicilia*. The advent of these new-comers must have been about three hundred years before the settlement of Naxos, and about eighty years before the Trojan War. The same author, in his account of the war made on Naxos by Messina and Syracuse, says: “The Siculi mountaineers came down in great numbers to offer help to Nasso.” (*Hist. Bk. IV.*)

## *Early Inhabitants*

The ancient Greek geographer, Scila Cariandeo, carefully traced the Peloritanian coast, and in his fine description of it speaks both of Naxos and Taormina: “Messina with a harbor, and then Taormina, Nasso, Catania, and so forth.”

Authors, in common with lower animals, differ in opinion. Some declare that Taormina was founded by the *Sicani*, who changed the ancient name of the island from *Trinacria* to *Sicania*. Diodorus says (*Com. Lib. Bk. V*):

“We owe much to Timeo, the historian of Taormina, for unmasking the ignorance of Filisto, in showing the *Sicanians* to have been natives of our Island and *not* strangers.”

W. C. Taylor, LL.D., M.R.A.S., of Trinity College, cites Taormina as among “the most remarkable cities on the eastern coast of Sicily” in ancient times. In his chronological discussion of its early inhabitants, he proceeds to say:

## *Origin*

“The Cyclopians and Læstrigons are said to have been the first inhabitants of Sicily. It is impossible to trace their origin; we only know that their settlements were in the vicinity of Mount *Ætna*. Their inhumanity toward strangers, and the flames of *Ætna*, were the source of many popular fables and poetic fictions. It was said that the Cyclops were giants; that they had but one eye, placed in the centre of their forehead; that they fed on human flesh; and that they were employed by Vulcan to forge the thunderbolts of Jove.

“Next in antiquity were the Sicanians, probably an Italian horde driven southward by the pressure of the Pelasgi, though many ancient writers assert that they came from Spain. They finally settled in the western part of the island, and were said to have joined the Trojan exiles in building Eryx and Egesta.

“After the Sicani had been for some ages exclusive masters of the island, the Siculi, an ancient people of Ausonia, crossed the strait; and having defeated the Sicanians in a sanguinary engagement, confined them in a narrow territory, and changed the name of the island from Sicania to Sicily. Some centuries after this revolution, Greek colonies began to settle on the Sicilian coast; . . .”

## *Early Inhabitants*

Perhaps no one can say at this time whence came the earliest settlers of this region of the island now known as Sicily. It is easier to believe that they came by sea than by descent from the Cyclops, as some say. It is not probable that the island was first settled by the Pelasgic tribes, who were not great travelers, and, therefore, were poor colonizers. It is almost certain, also, that there were many colonies on the island before the Hellenic migrations.

At all events, in very ancient times an unknown people inhabited the eastern part of Sicily. And it is probable that, terrified by Etna's erratic bursts of anger, and harassed by invaders who were gaining the mastery over them, they left their early homes and went over to build anew on the western and southern shores. This opinion is encouraged by both Thucydides and Diodorus. In the words of the last named author:

## *Origin*

“The ancient Sicanians inhabited small cities on the tops of mountains, well provided with precipitous cliffs, to protect them from the assaults of thieves.” (*Bk. V. Com. Lib.*)

Passing now to modern times, Francesco Scorsò, a noted Jesuit antiquary, says:

“There remains now little of the great city of Taormina, devastated as it has been, by Saracen invasions; indeed the same may be said of it as of the Eternal City: ‘You go looking for Rome in Rome.’ And so it really is. One looks for ancient Taormina in Taormina. This city that formerly had a circumference of five miles, measures now only two miles around. By examining the ruins, we found that the city once extended from the Gate of the Saracens, near the arch of Mola, to the convent of San Francisco di Paola; from the convent of the Friar Preachers to that of Santo Agostino; and from here to the plain of San Leone, beyond the monastery of the Franciscans Observants, to the place called by the peasants, ‘Guardiola’.”

Thus, whatever the origin of Taormina — by whomsoever founded and whenever

## *Early Inhabitants*

— regardless of the ravages of time and war, and notwithstanding the filth of degenerate days into which it has fallen, the town is, nevertheless, one of the beauty-spots of this warty earth. In the language of a great painter: “I have no quarrel with anyone who says, *this is the most beautiful place in all the world.*”



**ETNA**



## ETNA

WITHOUT Etna, Taormina would lose half its charm. Indeed, Sicily would not be Sicily if shorn of her majestic cone. From the earliest times Etna has attracted the interest of the world to the eastern shore of Sicily. No other volcano has ever received greater attention of poets, historians, and students of science. As an object of pure scenery it is equalled in some respects, but unrivaled in others. In its mythologic, historic, and poetic associations it towers above all other peaks of earth. It has so grown into the mind of man, that it has become a part of his literature and an inspiration to his pictorial art. It is so transmuted into his romantic conceptions, that its concrete value is secondary to its abstract worth.

The name *Etna* came from a Greek

## *Etna*

word meaning *to burn*. The mountain was celebrated by the poet Hesiod, and even by earlier authors known to us. During the Saracen occupancy from 827 to 1090 it was called *Gibel Uttamat*, or the mountain of fire. A corruption of this name still lingers in the mind of rural Sicily as *Mongibello*, which is composed of the Italian *monte* and the Arabic *gibel*.

In the days of mythology, Etna was the prison of the giant Typhon (Enceladus). Flame was his breath and thunder was his groan. When he turned from side to side the whole island quaked. Silius Italicus wrote:

Its lofty summits, wondrous to be told,  
Display bright flames amid the ice and cold;  
Above, its rocks, with flames incessant glow,  
Though bound in icy fetters far below;  
The peak is claimed by winter as its throne,  
While glowing ashes o'er its snows are shown.

Some of the ancient poets located the forge of Vulcan in the fiery bowels of

## *Etna*

Etna. Here also, as Virgil tells us, was the abode of the dreaded Cyclopean giants who had rebelled against Jupiter.

The port spacious, and secure from wind,  
Is to the foot of thundering Etna joined.  
By turns a pitchy cloud she rolls on high;  
By turns hot embers from her entrails fly,  
And flakes of mountain-flames that lick the sky.  
Oft from her bowels massy rocks are thrown,  
And shivered by their force come piecemeal  
down.

Oft liquid lakes of burning sulphur flow,  
Fed from the fiery springs that burn below.  
Enceladus, they say, transfixed by Jove,  
With blasted limbs came trembling from above;  
And when he fell, the avenging father drew  
This flaming hill, and on his body threw;  
As often as he turns his weary sides,  
He shakes the solid isle, and smoke the heavens  
hides.

Pindar in his *Pythian Ode* as early as  
**474 B.C.** says:

“Typhon is fast bound by a pillar of the sky,  
even by snowy Etna, nursing the whole year’s  
length her dazzling snow. Whereout pure

## *Etna*

springs of unapproachable fire are vomited from the inmost depth; in the daytime the lava streams pour forth a lurid rush of smoke, but in the darkness a red rolling flame sweepeth rocks with uproar to the wide deep sea.”

Eschylus also refers to this same “mighty Typhon.” In the writings of Thucydides is mentioned some of the early eruptions of the mountain. Among the names of the many ancient authors who have paid tribute to Etna may be cited those of Theocritus, Ovid, Livy, Seneca, Lucan, Petronius, Dion Cassius, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, Lucilius Jr., and scores of others less well known and of smaller importance.

In one way and another these early men, especially the poets, invested Etna with supernatural attributes. Demiurgic divinities, mighty demons and fair goddesses clustered around this mighty cone. High revelry was there. Human passions enlarged to terrible proportions by the im-

## *Etna*

agination hung like a necklace around this enchanted peak. Ominous threats and portentous bolts were hurled from its core of living fire.

There were always dissenters among men. Another class of early writers challenged the supernatural characters of this god-like mountain, and treated its phenomena as purely natural. They drove away the demi-gods and in their places peopled the cone with the less pictorial figments of natural fact. But the poetic myths clung with tenacity to this grim mountain. Lucilius, Jr., wrote a poem of six hundred and forty Latin hexameters which he called Etna. Superb fiction was slow to give way. Demeter, with torch in hand, wandered over the slopes of Etna for centuries seeking the lost Persephone. Acis and Galatea were loath to leave their native hearth-fire. For ages the handsome shepherd's blood gushed from under the rock that crushed him, and flowed

## *Etna*

down the eastern slope into the sea. His blood was changed to water, and the stream to this day is called Fiume di Jaci. Polyphemus and the Cyclops could not easily be disposed of by the processes of natural law.

In more modern times such men as Dante, Petrarch and Cardinal Bembo paid their respects to Etna. Fazzello climbed it in 1541 and described it in his work *De Rebus Siculis*. Fifty years later Antonio Filoteo, who was born beneath its plumed peak, published a book in Venice on the topography, history and eruptions of Etna.

Slowly the gods disappeared before the advance of science. Since then countless works have treated Etna and its phenomena. It has been mapped, measured, and studied. It has been described in letters and sung in verse; it has been painted and etched until its fame is secure as that of the

## *Etna*

newer Pliocene period that gave it birth from the lowly depths of ocean.

Sir John Herschell in 1826 found its height to be 10,872½ feet. But like that of a flame its height was not reared to be constant. It varies with its eruptions as its crests fall back into the cauldron of its crater.

Older than Vesuvius, Etna towers as a sentinel over the shores of the Ionian sea. Beneath her plume have passed the navies of the world, both old and young. Merchant ship and fighting galley, corsair and swift cruiser, pleasure yacht and freighter, passenger steamer and monstrous dreadnought have crawled beneath her shadow like little insects of the sea.

Battles have surged against her slopes; strange peoples have scratched her dark sides and deep valleys, and she has given them to eat. Cities and settlements have called her soil sacred because it was their

## *Etna*

mother-land. They have come like blossoming flowers and they have fled like spirits of the flesh leaving only their bones behind. She has watched over the destiny of man as a mother over her encradled babe. But her attitude has been one of contempt toward the little ways of men. Her real concern has been with the glories of sunset, and the serenity of dawn. The stars have been her sisters; the solemn night and the hard light of day have been and will continue for ages to be her inscrutable thoughts.

# **LANGUAGE**



## LANGUAGE

IN the early days there was no common language spoken over the Island of Sicily. Not only did language differ in the different cities, but it changed from time to time in the same city. This is well shown in Taormina whose inhabitants spoke at different periods barbarian dialects, Doric idiom, Oscan, Latin, Greek, corrupt Greek and Sicilian.

The Sicilians spoke a barbarian dialect until Sicily was conquered by the Greeks. Then, according to Diodorus,

“the cities situated by the sea were built by the Greeks. The Siculi with their commerce took on also Hellenistic manners and language even to the changing of their names.”

And naturally when the refugees of Naxos went to Taormina to live under the

## *Language*

protection of Prince Andromache they took their tongue with them. And naturally also the Taorminians persisted in their native speech. Both exiles and natives, however, to some extent spoke each other's language, with the result that the speech of one gradually corrupted that of the other. So far as Taormina is concerned, this state of mixed linguistics continued until Dionysius supplanted the residents with a Greek colony of his mercenary soldiers. Following this infamy, the geographer Scila Cariandeo and other authorities, classed Taormina with the Greek cities of Sicily:

“Ecco Imera e la prossima Taormina  
Che si mostrano greche Calcidesi.”

Here is Imera and nearby Taormina  
That show that they are Greek of Chalcis.

As the Greek colonies spread over Sicily the various Greek idioms took root until the Hellenic tongue became gen-

## *Language*

eral. This is very well shown in the writings of different authors. Empedocles of Agrigentum, for instance, used the Ionic; Ibico of Messina wrote in the Eolic; Tecrito of Syracuse, the Doric; while Diodorus of Agyrium made use of the common Greek. Oddly enough, the native Sicilians scorned the polished Attic idiom, while taking very kindly to the others less perfect and not so elegant. Plautus refers to this phenomenon in the *Mencenie*:

“Sebbene un cotal tema pur Grecizzi,  
Non tiene no dell’ Attico elegante,  
Ma pittosto del Siculo risuona.”

Although this theme has something of Greek,  
It certainly hasn’t anything of the elegant Attic

But rather it sounds like Sicilian.

The Oscan tongue, of which comparatively little is known, was spoken by the very early, if not the earliest, inhabitants

## *Language*

of Taormina. Some of the very oldest monuments show that the Sanniti used Oscan, at least, in their inscriptions. Assio in *The Carthaginian War*, first book; and Festus in his *Observations On The Latin Tongue*, lead us to infer that Oscan was the language of the earliest inhabitants of Sicily.

Oscan, originally Opscus — softened by the Greeks to Opicus and by the Latins to Oscus — was, according to Livy, spoken by the Samnites and Campanians. It is known to have had a literature, and at one time it was an important language. It resembled the Latin much more closely than any of the other Italian dialects, so called. Taormina, being situated virtually on the frontier between Hellenic and Phœnician civilization, felt at an early date the pressure of Semitic influence. This pressure soon modified the native speech and left traces both in blood and language which have survived the surging

## *Language*

influx of Ionian and other influences; some of these may be found to-day among the inhabitants. The Ionian tongue was sympathetic with the Oscan; being midway between the Greek and Latin, it was readily superimposed on the Oscan.

During the reign of Augustus Cæsar it seems to have been as easy to change the language of a country as its artificial boundary-lines. In the case of Taormina it was simply done. Augustus followed the example of Dionysius: merely drove out the dwellers and peopled their homes with a Roman colony. This was a common method of that epoch; and in this instance it marked the rise and signalled the dominance of Latin which held sway until the decline of the Roman colony.

As the Sicilians slowly drifted back to Taormina from neighboring villages, diluting the Roman population, they also corrupted the Roman tongue. Greek was gradually revived, and thenceforward

## *Language*

both tongues were spoken in Taormina; but there was also a third which is intimated by St. Pancrazio's admonition to the common people, who evidently spoke neither Greek nor Latin. He addressed them, according to his translator, Sirinondo, in these words: "If you would learn either Greek or Latin, we should be able to make you Christians more easily."

Slowly, as Greek power and influence grew, the Greek tongue became more and more general. Latin was retained however in the "Sacred Liturgy" through the influence of the Pope's missionaries, sent from Rome to fan the dying embers of the faith. Then along came the great iconoclast, Leone Isaurico, who overthrew the Roman Patriarchate, and put the province of Sicily under that of Constantinople. Thereafter, Greek may be said to have been the language of the island; for it was used not only in civil affairs but in the rites of the Church as well.

## *Language*

Thus so strongly and deeply rooted had the Greek tongue become in the mouths of the Sicilians that it easily survived the Saracen invasions. For we find Telofane Cerameo, who was archbishop of Taormina at the decline of the Mussulman power, addressing his subjects in Greek homilies.

But the Greek of Taormina, as of other Sicilian cities, became greatly corrupted through its long intercourse with tongue of Saracen, Goth and Vandal — each of which had left its taint. Then came the Norman rule, and the inevitable effect of Norman speech.

And so from the mixture of Oscan, Greek, Latin, Gothic, Vandal, Arabic, Norman, &c., arose the present supple Sicilian language. This language developed a construction of its own. It shows marked individual powers which are capable of a high order of expression, in which beauty is not lacking; and of a sufficient

## *Language*

number of organic traits to entitle it to be justly called a *mother tongue*.

### ORIGIN OF THE NAME TAORMINA

The ancient name of the town is lost. Pliny speaks of Naxos as the original name of Tauromenium; his error was owing to the proximity of the two settlements, and to the fact that the exiles of the former were received by the latter. The name may be traced back through many contortions to that of the mountain on which the city rests. During historic times it has been variously spelled: Tauromenium, Tauromenio, Taurominio, Travirmenio, Taurimenia, Tauromenon (Ovid), Tauromenone, Tauromenon (Cicero: "I could send the letters to Catania, *Tauromenon* and Syracuse more conveniently if the interpreter had written the names of the persons approved." *Letter to Atticus, Bk. XVI.*), Tabermin (Arabic), Tavermin (Roger of York),

## *Language*

Tauromeno (Bonfiglio), Tavermina,  
Tavermena, &c., &c.

There is a popular legend to the effect that a couple of lovers named *Tauro* and *Menea* combined their names into one which they gave to the town, calling it Tauromenea. The truthfulness of the legend is so improbable, however, that no one above a peasant in credulity ever considers it. There is very much more probability in the theory of Gregario Cerameo, one-time archbishop of Taormina, who says:

“Taormina was so called from the two words *Tauro*, meaning bull, and *mansione* which signifies abode; because the refugees of Nasso here made their abode. Therefore they named the city on Mount Tauro where they abode *Taormina*.”

*Mansione*, however is from the Latin, and it has been questioned whether Greek refugees would have chosen a Latin word as part of the name which they gave to

## *Language*

their adopted city. Yet, as Plutarch tells us in his *Life* of Numa Pompilius, “In those times Greek words were more mixed with the Latin than at present.” And it is altogether probable that the process of mixing often included the integral parts of new words. The same phenomenon is frequently encountered in the word-coining of to-day, especially among the unlearned.

As to the origin of *Tauro*, as applied to the mountain, Maurolico says that from a distance the two elevations, on one of which is the fortress of Mola and on the other the Castle of Taormina, resemble the horns of a bull; hence, etc. Between the horns lie the remains of a tower once known as Malvicino, which was built by Matteo Palizzo during the reign of Louis, King of Sicily.

So much for the name in its beginning and end.

# ANCIENT RUINS



## ANCIENT RUINS

THE circumference of Taormina has shrunken, as Father Scorsò has said, and her great monuments have fallen into decay. The old colossal structures which symbolized her power and made her famous among the cities of the world have disappeared and left scarcely a trace. The vicissitudes of more than twenty-four centuries have ground these gorgeous monuments into impalpable dust. Yet on this dust fame has thrown a light of glory which has not quite gone out. The eye of man may still gaze on some of her crumbled walls and broken works, that even now dazzle the imagination.

From Fazzello we learn that it was during the time of Prince Andromache that the most stately monuments were built.

## *Ancient Ruins*

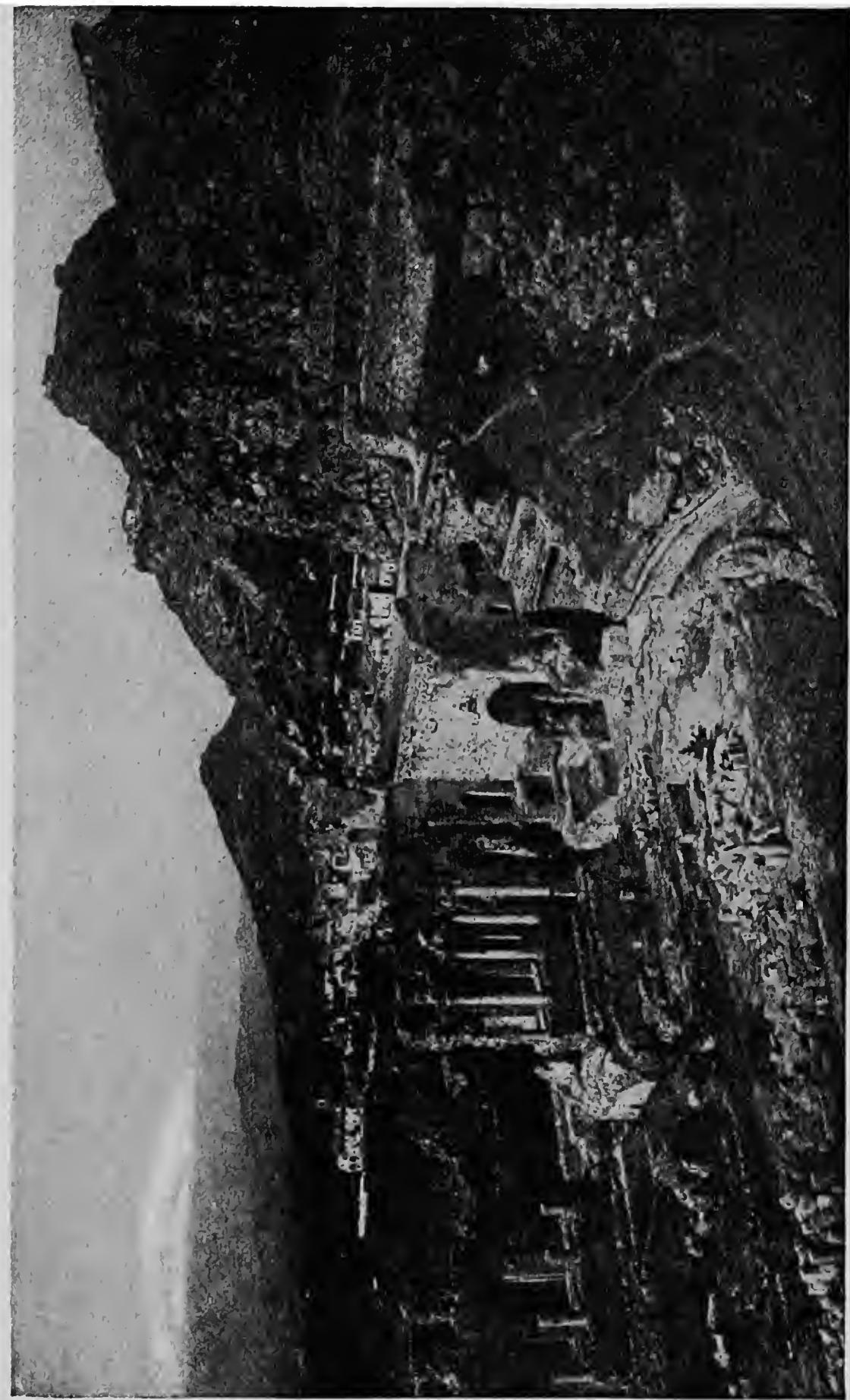
“Liberty being restored to Sicily in the days of Andromache and Timoleonte the cities became more populous and rich with public and private edifices, such as: temples sacred to the gods, courts of justice, pyramids, towers, theatres and other monuments of the most perfect workmanship.” (*Fazzello, Dec. 2. Bk. IV.*)

One of the oldest and most imposing remains is the theatre, described after this fashion by Antonio Martines, an erudite Sicilian author:

“In the eastern part of the city, where so many relics of antiquity have been discovered, there has been lately excavated a large theatre of brickwork, also two cisterns of vast subterranean vaults; of these one is still intact, supported by eight square columns. The cistern measures one hundred and fifty feet in length and thirty-six feet in breadth and thirty feet in height.”

In his *Introduction to the Homilies of Teofane Ceramiti, Archbishop of Taormina*, Scorsò holds forth in this wise:

“Fellow Citizens: We have here not only the ruins but even the standing remains of your



RUINS OF THE GRAECO-ROMAN THEATRE. ETNA IN THE DISTANCE



## *Ancient Ruins*

pristine grandeur. The buildings which seem to rival those of Rome itself are: a theatre of spacious dimensions, several aqueducts; a gymnasium where a Greek epigraph denotes the names of the presidents and victorious athletes; and family sepulchres as handsome as they are numerous. Now these edifices are of such elegance and splendor as to proclaim Taormina to have been a city of circumference, magnificence and population unusually great and illustrious."

The ruins of this theatre lie above the town hundreds of feet over the sea. Nothing in Italy, and perhaps nothing in the whole world, surpasses in beauty the view from this place. Over there are the Calabrian shores; below are the blue waters of the Ionian sea, once plowed by the keels of Greece and dotted with the sails of Phoenicia; in front, the shining peak of Etna waves a pearly plume; nearer lies the valley of the Alcantara; over there rise the mountains of Castiglione; hardby are high hills and rocky

## *Ancient Ruins*

peaks, each hallowed by some legend. On the other side of the town and high above it frowns S. Maria della Rocca, otherwise called the Castle of Taormina; and still higher rise the ruins of Mola; and above Mola towers the Monte Venere or Venerella. The dwindling peak of Lapa drops down to the northward; and near it are the famous marble quarries of Zirreto.

The theatre was built by the Greeks, repaired and modified by the Romans, and ravished of its marble ornaments by the Duca di S. Stefano, who used them in decorating his palace. The auditorium is semi-circular in form, hewn in the rock and walled up on two sides with Roman masonry. “The theatre,” says the Encyclopædia Britannica, “is next to that at Aspendus (Pamphylia), the best-preserved in existence.”

The “Castle,” formerly the Acropolis, perched on rocks one thousand and three hundred feet above the sea, has played an

## *Ancient Ruins*

important part in the drama of Taormina's history.

"It commands a view of the site of Naxos, the earliest(?) Greek colony in Sicily, founded by Theocles in b.c. 735. Naxos is now occupied by a lemon-plantation, situated between the influx of the Alcantara and the bay on which Giardini lies. The altar of Apollo Archagetes, the tutelary god of the colonists, on which the ambassadors of the Sicilian Greeks were wont to offer sacrifices before starting for the Hellenic festal assemblies, stood between the river and Taormina. Naxos was subjugated by Hiero I of Syracuse in 476, but soon regained its liberty and espoused the cause of Athens, whose general Nicias wintered in the town in 415-14. It was destroyed by Dionysius in 403."

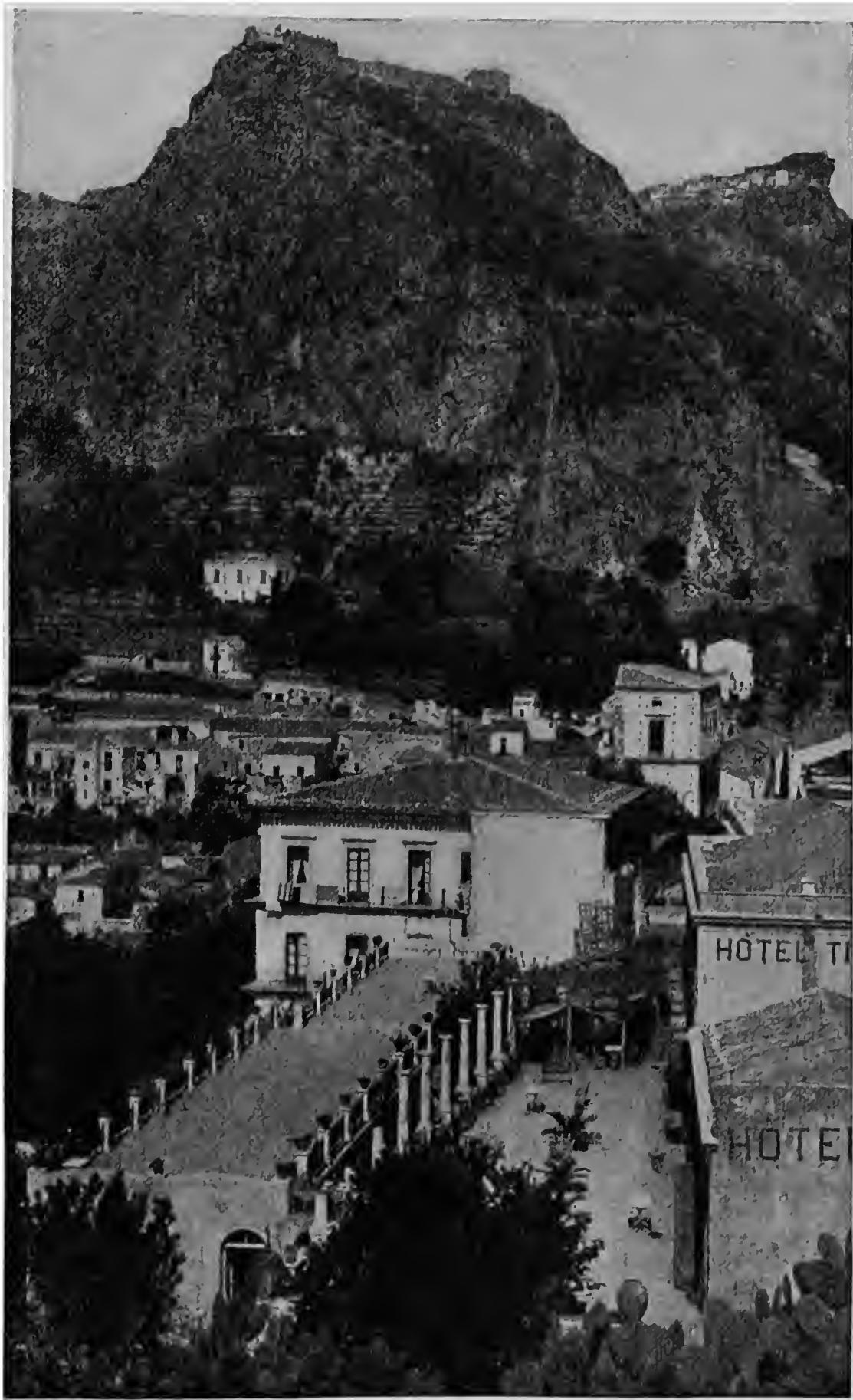
*Baedeker.*

On the slope rising from the town is the Badia Vecchia, the beautiful ruins of a fine Gothic structure surrounded by almond trees and overgrown with flowering vines. In the Corso toward the Catania gate is the Gothic *Palazzo S. Stefano*. Just outside the town to the left going

## *Ancient Ruins*

toward the Messina gate is a Norman arch. Along the road to the right descending to Giardini are some Roman tombs; and farther along the same road is the one-time church of SS. Pietro e Paolo. “Near the Porta Francese are the rock tombs of pre-Hellenic origin.”

Castle Mola, a fortress town, is remarkable for the natural advantages of its situation, and for its great antiquity. According to Scorsò: “There is no doubt that this fortress is one of the first built in Sicily.” Taormina, lying far below it on the rocks of Pelora, has had recourse to its sheltering walls and forbidding precipices through all her serious troubles of the early centuries. When the Saracens had vanquished Sicily, Mola alone remained free. And when Frederic II had taken Taormina, her treasures were safe in the keep of Mola. Finally, when Mola fell into the hands of the Spaniards it was only after a long siege, and when water



CASTLE MOLA



## *Ancient Ruins*

failed him, that Count Bulgari was forced to surrender.

The Tower Tauromenio rises from the center of the town where its clock sounds the hours. It is a mediæval monument not especially interesting although its history has been stirring. During the last French invasion it was partly destroyed but promptly restored with public funds when peace was resumed. The inscription on its door commemorates the fact:

“D.O.M.  
Carlo II, Hisp. Rege,  
Gallorum Damnis Communi  
Aere Refectis,  
Assistente D. Antonino Bela y Serrano  
Societatis Militae  
Hispanæ Duce  
Turrim Hanc Cives Ob Temporis  
Distributionem Eregerunt  
Juratis Nicolao Papale,  
Heronimo Consentino et Joseph Archidiacono  
Et Paolo Romano;  
Anno Incarnationis  
MDCLXXIX.”

## *Ancient Ruins*

D.O.M.

(*Deo Optimo Maximo*)

To God, very good, very great.

Under the reign of Charles II, King of Spain,

After having repaired with public funds

The damage caused by the French, with

The assistance of Don Antonino Bela y Serrano,

Commander of the military company of Spain,

The citizens erected this tower

For the division of time,

While the sworn officers were Nicolao Papale,

Heronimo Consentino, the archdeacon Joseph

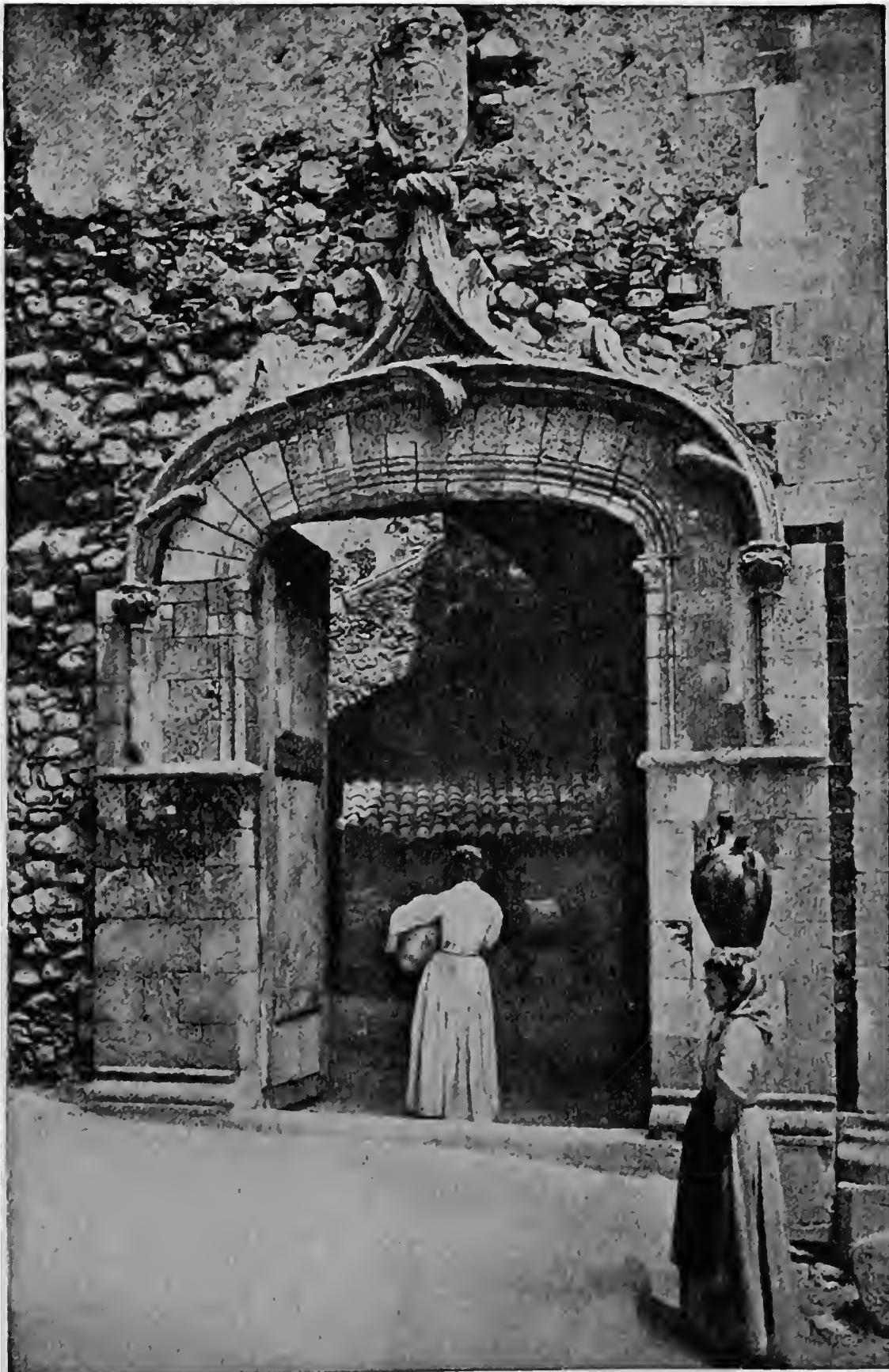
and Paola Romano;

In the year of Christ

1679.

Some of Taormina's ruins hark back to the Siculi; but the most of them are reminders of the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome.

It is evident that the ancient Taorminians were a luxury-loving people much given to the embellishing and the beautifying of their city. The Saracen invasions, however, used up their resources and imposed such grim tasks that esthetic con-



POR TA DEL PALAZZO CORVAJA



## *Ancient Ruins*

siderations were neglected by them, and for the most part have been allowed by their successors to sleep in peace ever since.

There is not an atom of dust amidst these ruins that does not bear some trace of intimate human association — not an atom unstained with blood or unwashed with tears — not an atom untouched by laughter or unmoved by hope — every one is reminiscent and every one prophetic. And that is the reason why Taormina's decay is vibrant with a living interest.



# FAMOUS TAORMINIANS



## FAMOUS TAORMINIANS

CERTAIN spots of earth seem especially fated to bring forth great souls. This has been noted for centuries, and the phenomenon has been commented on by fool and philosopher. The theories of the one have been about as convincing as those of the other.

There is of course a reason for everything; the only trouble is to find it. Owing to insufficient data the science of geniology — whereby genius may be produced at will — has not progressed very far. There are certain conditions so favorable however to the birth of intellect, that they are obvious to plain commonsense. Wholesome environment and liberal nurture are conducive to health of body and mind. Yet the factors of illustrious being seem not all contained in *nurture* and

## *Famous Taorminians*

*nature*, to use a pregnant phrase. Genius seems to require something else; and that something is possibly the intermingling of blood from widely different sources. There may be some exotic stimulus — some strange verve — that is necessary to precipitate from innocent protoplasm the unusual intellect.

At all events, Taormina has mothered a goodly number of great men. Cicero said: “The citizens of Taormina are as entirely free from contention and ill-will as are the great men who come from there.”

Andromache was a Prince of Taormina; he seems also to have been a prince of men. He was renowned for his patriotism and many other splendid traits. Diodorus praised him; and he was widely honored by his contemporaries. He loved liberty, and did much to make his fellows free, as we are told by Plutarch and others. He helped to beautify his city, and was

## *Famous Taorminians*

all in all an illustrious example of civic conscience. He was the father of Timea, who was the mother of Timeofante, the philosopher.

Timeo, the son of Andromache, was a celebrated historian justly eulogized by Polibeo, Strabo, Plutarch and others. Both Syracuse and Palermo have claimed his nativity, but Strabo, Plutarch, Diodorus and other reputable authors state unequivocally that he was born in Taormina.

“In this city he lived, foreign to all ambition of power and glory; devoting his time from early youth to his literary studies. In his old age Agathocles entered the city with an army and Timeo was obliged to escape to Athens to avoid the vengeance of the tyrant (who had been made to feel his pen). There he completed his admirable history and ended his life at the advanced age of ninety-six years.”

*Plutarch.*

Only a few scattered fragments of his works remain of the great volume turned out during his long and active career.

## *Famous Taorminians*

Taking the words of Suidas for whatever they may be worth:

“He composed eight books of Italian and Sicilian History; a Compendium of Rhetorical Rules and the Olimpianica or Chronological Facts; also a History of the War between the Romans and King Pirro.”

He is said to have been quick-tempered, inclined to vitriolic speech and unusually severe in his condemnations. For this reason he was nicknamed *Epitimeo*, or the Blamer. He was very revengeful toward Agathocles, for which he may well be forgiven.

Filea was a famous mechanic — and much more. He built a “royal ship” for king Gerone, which according to Ateneo, contained timber exactly equal to that required for “three three-oared galleys.” He was not only a fine mechanic, but a practical carpenter dexterous in the use of tools; a fine mathematician and the inventor of mathematical instruments, un-

## *Famous Taorminians*

happily lost to us; a good architect and altogether a very remarkable man who accomplished many noteworthy feats in his day.

Cajo Numitorio and Marcus Publio Cozio are mentioned by Cicero as distinguished noblemen of the suburbs of Taormina. Cozio is said to have been the foremost scientific horticulturist of his day.

Of those distinguished in the Gymnasium whose names, among others, have come down to us in ancient inscriptions may be mentioned: Frisio, Sosio, Callimaco, Cenio, Aristarchus, Eristene, Demetrio, Agatarco, Filodemo and Apollodorus (of Athens).

These old warriors — for they were that if anything — are now mere fighting shadows such as I saw last night on a cinematograph screen. They come into view out of nothing and into nothing they return. Perhaps they are as real now as they ever were. The forces of which they

## *Famous Taorminians*

were the symbols still exist, although other symbols have taken their places on the screen — just as we, too, shall pass and other signs shall stand in our stead and move where we have moved.

# ANCIENT PRODUCTS



## ANCIENT PRODUCTS

THE Taorminian grape was renowned in antiquity — so much so, that its wine was even preferred over Julius Cæsar's famous *marmertine* at Rome. “Eugenia” the grape was called and its blood proved to be, as its name indicates, really of good family. This grape, it is said, grew nowhere else so well as in the fields of Taormina, with the one exception mentioned by Pliny in Bk. XIV, Chap. 2, which was in Albano, Italy.

On the ancient Taorminian medals was represented a bunch of grapes hanging over the lyre of Apollo. This suggested not only a good word for the excellence of their wine, but led one to infer that when it was taken in the right quantity, it so warmed the cockles of the heart that music

## *Ancient Products*

flowered, as it were, from the lips. But this marvelous grape was allowed to perish utterly, and good native wine has long been only a tradition.

During the fifth and sixth centuries a rare sugar cane grew in the flat country below the city. Tradition says, that the exterior of this cane was rough and knotty, but that its pulp was dripping with a sweet and fragrant juice, which when slightly cooked resembled honey in flavor and consistency; and when properly boiled down it produced an excellent granulated sugar. Some time in the latter part of the sixth century, foreign importations so discouraged the Taorminian farmer that he permitted both cane and vine to die.

Of all the ancient marble quarries, Taormina's were the most celebrated. Cluverio speaks of these marbles as rare and handsome; and Fazzello says they were the finest in the world, adding:

## *Ancient Products*

“Gerone, King of Syracuse, having built a great ship, with royal magnificence, ordered a throne and a bath to be made of the marble of Taormina.”

The fish markets of Taormina were highly esteemed in ancient times. The fish sold there must have been very good, since they inspired the poet Giovenale to sing of them:

“Quand a termine viene il desinare,  
Al padron si appresenti il dolce mullo  
Che a noi reca la Corsica, e Taormina ;  
Perché nel nostro mar la crudel gola  
Pria menomollo, e poi tutte il destrusse.”

When the dinner is nearly over,  
Bring to the master the sweet mullet,  
Which comes to us from Corsica and Taormina ;  
For in our sea our cruel gluttony  
First made it rare and then destroyed it all.

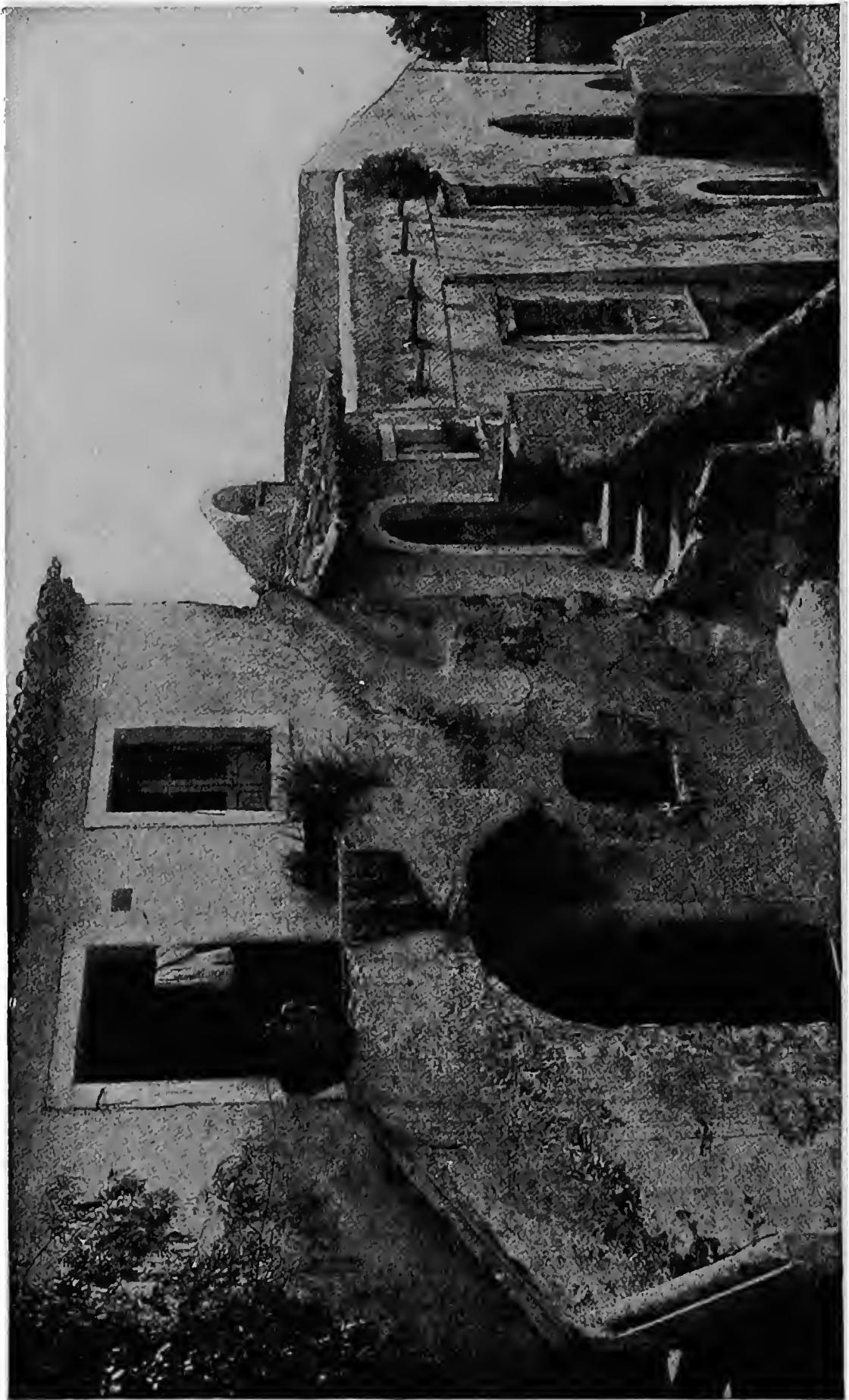
*Juvenalis.*

The Taorminian mullets, now called “triglie,” were evidently considered a great delicacy in the old days. But the

## *Ancient Products*

red mullet of those empire times have been supplanted in these by the cardfish, now seined during the whole summer season in Taorminian waters.

## **TAORMINA OF TO-DAY**



A TYPICAL ABODE

## TAORMINA OF TO-DAY

ORDINARILY the least part of a city is its shell. Houses and streets have their own interest and their own beauty — their own peculiar significance and ugliness. But the *life* of a city is the stuff of which its charm is made. Taormina is an exception. The soul of this city is as monotonous as the drab of its numerous cats, the coats of which have taken on the warm gray tones of the low tile-roofs which they infest. So far as *life* is concerned, the city is moribund. So far as *soul* is concerned, it has been a corpse for centuries. But its site of great distances — its soft coloring — its streets hushed at noonday as by some weird enchantment — its leaning walls in flower — its secluded gardens — its terraces — its lemon and almond groves — its crystal air: crystal and flame

## *Taormina of To-day*

at noon — opal and pearl at either edge of day — its castled crests, and crumbling ruins — these things are Taormina of to-day — yet they seem more truly of yesterday and forever.

The life of Taormina is its ghosts. The soul of Taormina is its departed glory. But the charm of Taormina is its shell; and the shell is not dead, but gay as a dancing-girl in quaint, old costume.

The walls of Taormina are marvels of beauty; they have proportion which falls in with the hills and sloping distances; they have color which suggests a precious quality, and speaks of the billowing years which have broken over them and left traces upon them; they have flowers which burst in flame from every cranny; and they seem to irradiate something that we are accustomed to see only in the sweet faces of some very old persons. Moreover, these walls have a character that I have seen nowhere else in masonry. They

## *Taormina of To-day*

bring to my mind the idea of great sheltering arms stretched out lovingly — the idea of protection combined with tenderness; and again, the idea of ferocious, repellent power, as that of a savage mother under sudden attack. They crawl along precipitous heights with a seeming cunning and caution born of bitter experience. They exhale pride where they rise up boldly — almost arrogantly. They symbolize watchfulness, as if looking off across the sea and scanning with sleepless eyes the dim Calabrian shores. They seem like materialized dreams; and again, like personified memory; and they suspire of a peace which is seen in the sprawling form of the feline mother basking in the sun, secure and alone with her kittens. These walls run into beetling hills and disappear; they seem as enduring as the great cliffs which support them and the mountains which rise above them; they combine lines, masses, colors, lights and shades which

## *Taormina of To-day*

language cannot describe and which art cannot paint; they are the material of which temples and palaces are built; they have the air of the sanctuary on their surface, and the repose of the tomb in their decay; they abound with esthetic suggestion; they are wrapped in a mellow loveliness — have moods of dreamy repose; and artlessly they create an art that is altogether marvelous.

The streets of Taormina bathed in the fiery gold of noon, or filled with shadows on either side of noon, or veiled with the diaphanous tints of evening, or suffused with the moonlight of midnight, fill my soul with the peculiar pleasure which one feels when for the first time in the presence of some matchless work of art.

It is true now, as DeForbin observed nearly a hundred years ago, that the paving is bad, and the side-streets reek with filth; the houses are falling to decay; the architecture is neither wonderful nor



STRADA DEL PESCATORI



## *Taormina of To-day*

unique; their roof-tiling is a warm gray-brown; their lines, proportions and colors are not especially remarkable, and the carvings here and there are little better than mediocre — and yet the streets are enchanted. Walking in them one instinctively listens for echoes of the past, and half expects to encounter ghosts at the next corner. One thinks of martial sounds: of reed and drum and tramp of feet; and imagines waving plumes, a forest of spears, tragic encounters and all kinds of dramatic situations. Love-scenes one looks for — in the piazza — by the fountain — in the garden of St. Dominico — at the theatre on the hill — and on the jutting places above Giaradini and the sea. There is an imponderable presence in the streets: the presence of multitudes whose bodies have been blown dust and flowering plants for centuries.

Those who associate the beauty of streets with stately mansions, newly fash-

## *Taormina of To-day*

ioned façades, freshly finished doors, shining metal-work, plate-glass windows and faultless pavement, will find Taormina shabby, dirty and squatly. But those who have something besides mere matter-of-fact eyes to see with — those who are at home when illusion knocks at the door of the soul — those who can feel the subtle spirit of the seasons' change — will look upon these streets with delight, and will behold palaces of gray marble and jade, and red gold with trimmings of deep amethyst and pale yellow amber.

The ruins of Taormina speak to one according to one's soul — one's experience — one's dreams and visions. Perhaps that is the reason why they tell a different tale to every one. To me they speak wholly of the past. They do not seem to be of the present at all, but rather mere softened, historic projections, tinted with legend, and massed more by fancy than in fact. They are dim islands in a sea of



A TYPICAL SIDE STREET



## *Taormina of To-day*

glory, faintly seen through the mists of time. They are populous with ghosts, and musical with subdued echo-voices. They have no place in the hard light of day — they seem at home only in the light of the moon. I cannot look upon them in a clear, raw light; they cry for “some beautiful haze of the soul”— some veil of mystery deeper than that of time, and golden as the spirit of pure romance.

The environs of Taormina are best seen in the warmth of spring. Then the hills are enchanted and the blue of the sea is deep. The cactus turns into goblin-faces — the valleys are thronged with fairies, and the deep gorges with demons. Then the flowers are joyous in every fibre of their placid, passive beings; the winding roads seem velvet-soft — the rugged peaks less hard and sharp against the sky. All is a phantasmagoria of light and shade, of warmth and color, of repose and serene delight. Nothing is real — not

## *Taormina of To-day*

even the wind — there is no nonsense of pride — of personal possession — no delusion of personal ownership — no weight of corporeal being — no chains of the flesh — no bondage of the Great Busy World. All is impersonal well-being with a sense of universal loveliness and lightness, such as dreams are made of when their gauzy wings are spread one moment before they take their flight. Then the grass ripples along the road-side under the touch of invisible fingers; the vines seem content in the sheltered nooks among the rocks; the terraces are sleepy under the kisses of the sun and the saline breath of the sea. Off in the distance the foamy shore-line curves in and out playing hide-and-seek with spume of wave and sprite of land; farther away the high hills sink and the hard peaks fade in an aerial sea of pearl and purple and the thinnest of fleecy mist. And sparkling Etna seems the home and habitation of the gods.

## *Taormina of To-day*

Many a night, from a rose-embowered balcony, I have looked off over Naxos, and beyond — along miles and miles of sea and shore. There I have watched the twinkling lights of Sicilian settlements when something in the air — something in



VILLA RIPOSO

the distances — something in the odors of the night — in the breezes of the sea — in the white wraith of the winding surf; some subtle spirit of the hills — some voice of bird or low murmur of almond leaves — something, I know not what! wrapped me in a mood palpitating with

## *Taormina of To-day*

beauty and alive with old romance. I cannot describe the mood, nor would I thus profane it if I could; but it brought to my soul a nameless joy: I felt the amorous ripples of long bygone days break over me in endless numbers; all the shadows were peopled with lovers, and the leaves all whispered their vows; and I knew a presence: a spirit of the past so real that my soul was clothed with the fresh garments of a new faith; and I saw that what we call *past*, *present* and *future* are mere relative terms for a cycle of conscious being. I understood for the first time how closely related to our being was this deathless and dateless Trinity of phases dancing before us forever in a circle. I saw the Phœnician merchant ships sailing like shadows on a sunless sea; I heard the songs of the sailors; I saw the Greek galleys of War crawling along like ominous shades under oars bent by straining arms and ghostly backs rhythmically bowed and

## *Taormina of To-day*

sprung; and I heard faint echoes of famous conflicts, and knew at last how transient all glory must be except that which bursts like flame from loving deeds.

As for the residents of Taormina, I should not call them *âmes bien nées*.



THE DANCERS

There are exceptions, of course. But the old passionate stock has died out with the sugar cane and the grape, leaving only salacious dregs; the blood has become so dilute with exotic sordidness, so feeble through waste, so acrid by disease and cor-

## *Taormina of To-day*

rupt by want and cruel by woe, that its divine color has faded and its strength departed from it.

The fact that present-day Taorminians are not very much worse than they are is a hopeful sign. Their ruins tell us through what terrible culminations of barbaric splendor these folk have passed. For many centuries their civilization was founded on the crimes of conquest, cruelties of massacre and slavery. Temples and palaces sprang up amongst them, and decayed; art and science they knew and the wonders of civilization were theirs. To-day what remains? Beautifully colored dust of ruins shimmering in the sun, and beside it pools of shadowy gloom. These are the sad memories called *history*. And it is well. For if human beings were capable of inheriting the good effects of civilization, they would also be capable of inheriting the evil consequences of barbarism. As the records of mankind show a

## *Taormina of To-day*

vast preponderance of cruelty over kindness, the race, long ages since, must have degenerated into worse than wild beasts. It will take millions of years yet for the training incidental to civilization so to interweave itself with the innate aptitudes of selection, that it can share evenly with them in the production of qualities which may be inherited. Until then, progress will have to rub along patiently as it has in the past.

As for Taormina's waifs from other shores — the exiles, ticket-of-leave men and immigrants — the least said of them the more merciful. Among the newcomers one encounters traveling salesmen who have repented and wandering literary men who have not — outcast “nobles” basking in the only rehabilitation possible to them which is in the poor, ignorant peasant's doffed cap — encottaged wealth strangely reticent of its nativity — villas which resound with midnight debauchery

## *Taormina of To-day*

— monkey-faced old “ladies of title” whose fathers worked at the forge or in the carpenter shop — and escaped lunatics, only mildly mad, whose chief delusion is that they can paint and draw, but who succeed better with their “receptions” for



THE DONKEY CART

gossip and “bridge.” These are indeed a pathetic lot — the usual exceptions, *c'est bien entendu!* for they have wandered far from the Soul's gardens, and have planted others of ugliness amidst material ruin where they seem to find a sympathy for their own spiritual loss.

## *Taormina of To-day*

Night has come upon Taormina — Night, the Mother of Shadows! Darkness has kissed away the glory from her brow so completely that the historian can now see nothing clearly. Only the poet may behold that city as it was. For what is left except rock, ruin and a few tracings in the dust that the winds of the centuries have not swept entirely away?

And yet when the last of these are gone, and successive ages shall have moulded new forms out of the same old cosmic dust, the same invisible actors shall repeat to the last detail all the heavy tragedy and happy comedy that broke in billows over this stage so well builded on the rock. These groups of sensations have all the possibilities of those associated energies which work magic with soil and sun and dew.

Night has come and Day shall not break on Taormina's shores again. But all that it was shall be again and again — all that it *was* — yet never again the *same*.



# A LITTLE STORY OF HISTORY



THE FOUNTAIN

## A LITTLE STORY OF HISTORY MINGLED WITH TRADITION

WHEN the Sanniti were scourged with pestilence and sore with the anger of the gods, Stenio Mattio, their Prince, had a dream. In the dream the great Apollo spake to him saying: “O Prince, if thou wouldst save thy people from the just but terrible anger of the gods thou shalt sacrifice unto me all the first-born in the land.” The sacrifice was made, and the plague ceased.

For twenty years following this inscrutable act of divine clemency the Prince felt that he was hand-in-glove with the gods; that is to say, he had the true princely feeling. And he congratulated his people on having such a Lord as himself to rule over them. He was spiritually exhilarated and

## *History and Tradition*

serious in his prayers, although a trifle careless in private conduct, as many another devout person has been since his day.

Then suddenly and without warning the pestilence re-appeared more terrible than before. This time the Prince did not wait for a dream, for he loved to rule over his people, and was disconcerted at the renewed wrath of the gods, wondering what he had done to merit such chastisement. Therefore he went directly to consult Apollo, and humbly asked what it was all about, just as meek Christians do to-day when they seek spiritual light from the good Lord Christ. And Apollo answered him saying: "This evil that has fallen upon thee and thy people shall cease not nor abate until all those first-born who escaped slaughter two decades ago shall be banished from the land which the gods have given unto thee."

The Prince took his cue in the proper

## *History and Tradition*

spirit, and became very active. He played his part so well, that hundreds and hundreds of victims of some unknown but vicarious sin were rounded up as a dazed herd and sent off to sea, whither they knew not. And they suffered the usual hardships of the innocent who atone for the sins of the guilty. And after sailing many days they passed the straits of Messina, and were guided to the shores of Taormina where they landed and proceeded to make themselves at home in that hospitable community.

This took place in such an ancient day that the very year is unknown; but it was long before the City on the Hill was called Taormina. For it was only after the fall of Naxos in 470 b.c. that this name was given to the settlement on Mount Tauro. But whenever it was, there was a contemporaneous people, later called Messinians, who had become tired of war and were about to abandon their country.

## *History and Tradition*

About this time it occurred to them to seek the aid of the noble Taorminians, as they were afterward called. For even in that day these people were obliging in all ways, but at the same time prudent, as behooves the willing as well as the wise. Therefore they answered the prayer of the Messinians saying: “It is true, we are a brave race and would gladly go to your assistance, for our hearts are kind and our shields are polished; but being less experienced in war than some visitors who are sojourning with us, we cheerfully send them in our stead and faith, and with full confidence not only in their prowess at arms, but in their grace of knowing how to die bravely in battle, even although the cause of which be no concern of theirs.”

And so the Sanniti were sent over to the Messinians, and they fought like brave men and won many victories. And when the war was over and the battle-drum was still, the Messinians invited what was left

## *History and Tradition*

of their allies to remain with them *en famille*, as it were. This indeed they did, and at so doing called themselves Marmertini in honor of their great god, Mammers, who led them out of the wilderness of peace and out of the confusion of battle with their standards aloft.

From this extremely probable incident, of which there are many versions, several historians have sagely written in their records, that Taormina sent a military colony to the city of Messina. The truthfulness of this narrative must rest with Alsio and Sextus Pompey (*Carthaginian War, Bk. I*). It is not recorded that they died with clear consciences; but I hope they did.

\*       \*       \*

Now these ancient times were noted for the spirit of reciprocity which obtained between neighboring cities. If the population of one was too small, it merely drew

## *History and Tradition*

on its neighbor for a colony. If on the other hand, its population was unwieldy, it sent a colony to a smaller town. Those were neighborly days.

Taormina having sent the Sanniti to Messina to help her in an hour of need, Messina in turn sent a colony to Taormina — not that Taormina needed more mouths to feed; no, not that! but merely as a friendly act — a matter of courtesy. This is probably what Strabo had in mind when he wrote of the exchange of colonies among Sicilian cities. He said: “Catania received a colony from Naxos and Taormina from Messina.”

\*     \*     \*

Taormina has honored herself in many ways, not alone in showing honor to her visitors. It is really true that she both sent to and received colonies from other towns. Besides colonies, however, she has received with open arms many dis-

## *Pythagoras*

tinguished individuals, even as she has sent forth her great sons. In our own times has she not entertained such glowing lights as Robert Hichens, Thomas Nelson Page and others? Yes indeed she has! and their fame has spread over the mountains to Mola and beyond, even unto the heights of Monte Venerella. But greater than these modern, and therefore effete notables, all rolled up together into a tiny ball, was one Pythagoras, Philosopher.

### PYTHAGORAS

This great man toured the island at a time when the yoke of tyranny was heavy on the necks of the people. He is said to have taught Taormina, among other cities, the art of free government. For this he was royally entertained by the Taorminians. (Maleo.) And he not only taught free-government to the citizens, but free-love to “a fair lute-player.” His success in this was quite as brilliant as in the

## *History and Tradition*

realms of pure philosophy and ice-cold reason. There has always been, it seems, something in the air of Taormina that forever whispers love into the ears of its visitors. And it was the same in the days of Pythagoras as it is to-day.

The influence of this wonderful man's career, which nearly crossed the sixth century b.c., was profoundly felt in the cultured cities of Sicily. His modification of the Eastern doctrine of Metempsychosis, and his advanced views which sensibly embraced woman's rights as merely *human* rights, were popular in Taormina. And it is probable that he demonstrated to his pupils there his famous theorem: the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides.

## EMPEDOCLES

But Taormina has always been a guest-city to beauty-lovers of the world and to

## *Empedocles*

philosophers ancient and modern. About the middle of the fifth century B.C. a very vain man from the Doric city of Acragas (later called Girgenti) used often to visit Taormina and discourse to his friends and neighbors in a very entertaining fashion.

His views were extremely “modern,” and he succeeded admirably in carrying off the signs of the charlatan with the symbols of the sage. He was honored by the populace and greatly beloved by his Taorminian pupils whom he used to meet in a little grove which stood on the edge of town overlooking Naxos. And it may have been that there in the sight of Etna and the sea he first uttered: “No wise man would imagine that mortals had no existence before their birth, and will have none after their dissolution.” The man who said that was the spiritual ancestor of the Belgian “Blue Bird” man. This was Empedocles, pupil of Parmenides, whose

## *History and Tradition*

“philosophy,” in the words of A. W. Benn, B.A.,

“has left a permanent stamp on language which the discoveries of modern chemistry have not been able to efface.” (*Early Greek Philosophy.*)

Another great name associated with this city is that of Gorgias of Leontini. It is believed that he taught rhetoric and sophism in Taormina, and that he visited the town frequently.

### PROTAGORAS

Protagoras, born 480 B.C., the first and greatest of the Sophists, was lost at sea in his seventieth year on a voyage from Athens to Taormina. He had just been expelled from Athens as a pernicious agnostic because he began a book in these words: “As to the gods, I do not know whether they exist or not. Life is too short for such difficult enquiries.” And

## *“The Faliride”*

the flames that burned his book left one of the smuttiest marks ever made on the records of Greek civilization.

\*       \*       \*

As becomes a liberty-loving people, the ancient Taorminians were ever ready to help the oppressed.

## **“THE FALIRIDE”**

And so when Faliride was tyrannizing over the Agrigentini, the Taorminians joined forces with the Catanians to help liberate the Agrigentini, and — were promptly vanquished and subjugated. In vain did Taormina offer large sums to ransom her citizens made prisoners by Faliride. But the tyrant was adamant and answered the request with only a cool society stare, which was then as it is now utterly disconcerting.

A very interesting account of all this is contained in the letters known as “The

## *History and Tradition*

Faliride," written long after the event by some unknown author. Suidas is inclined to give them credence, for as he says: "There is nothing in them strange or impossible, and much that is probable."

\*       \*       \*

Taormina was ever eager, despite any defeat, to espouse war in the name of justice. On this rock her character rested as firmly as her walls on the Mountain of Taurus. Consequently when the strife broke out between Syracuse and Lentini that disrupted the peace of all Sicily, Taormina could not remain inactive.

At this time Lentini sought aid from all the Greek cities to which it was in one way and another related. Naxos, the largest, was first to respond, but being unprotected it was captured by the enemy. Then it was that the Siculi of Mount Taurus, lately freed from the oppression of Faliride, descended like furies to fight

## *Dionysius*

for Naxos. A bloody battle followed in which more than a thousand were slain; and when the day was done the Syracusan army was fleeing in fearsome rout.

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## DIONYSIUS

Dionysius of Syracuse, also called the Younger, is generally accredited with being a most iniquitous tyrant. He seemed to delight not only in torturing his enemies, but in tormenting his subjects as well. His favorite practices were to exile or to put to death those who displeased him. In other words, he had all the traits of a Simon Pure royal gentleman. So dreaded and offensive had he become, that several Greek cities in Sicily arose against him. Among these were Naxos and Catania, which being situated nearest his domains, he decided to punish first. He was a wily as well as a wicked man; and before risking battle bribed one Procle

## *History and Tradition*

with gold and promises of protection to become a traitor to his town in facilitating the entrance of its enemy's troops. Unfortunately rogues succeed where honest men fail. Having gained possession of Naxos by this means, Dionysius turned the city over to be sacked by his soldiers (403 b.c.), with orders to respect nothing save the person and property of the traitor and those who sought protection under him.

At this time Andromache ruled the Siculi, and he opened the doors of his city to all the citizens of Naxos who had been able to escape. Immediately the city on the hill was enlarged; new walls were built, some of which stand until this day. And the city on Mount Taurus, as Diodorus Siculus says in the XVI Book of his *History*, was given the name of Taormina.

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## *A Conspiracy*

### A CONSPIRACY

Sicily, weakened by violent changes and continually disturbed by fearful agitations, had become prey to the personal ambitions of unworthy men. Treachery was rampant, and security seemed entirely of the past. This was a period propitious for the hatching of plots and the rise to power of unscrupulous persons of wholly selfish purposes.

At this juncture of time and events, Dionysius, Iceta Leongio and Annone, Prefect of Carthage, conspired together to bend and shape the destiny of Sicily to their own desires and personal profit. But Andromache, the far-seeing patriot of Taormina, matched his wits and measured his will successfully with theirs.

Accordingly, he made a compact with the Corinthians. An army was raised and put under the command of General Timoleonte, who was noted for his bravery and

## *History and Tradition*

sagacity. These forces arrived with despatch in ships at the harbor of Reggio; and regardless of the protest of the Carthaginian ambassadors against the landing of armed forces in Sicily, Timoleonte with a knowing sort of smile proceeded across the strait to Taormina where he was received joyously by Andromache and the entire populace.

The Carthaginians sent new ambassadors to the Corinthians in Taormina, but without effect on the predetermined course of the commanding General. Meanwhile the city of Aderno marched its forces around the northern slope of Etna to join those of Timoleonte and Andromache; its army was opposed en route by five thousand soldiers under the leadership of Iceta. Timoleonte however with a detachment of two thousand made a brilliant dash, formed a juncture with his ally, and signally defeated the enemy. In this battle three hundred were left dead

## *Agathocles the Handsome*

on the field; six hundred were taken prisoners, and the rest escaped in flight; and if Longevity Metchnikoff had lived in that day, the majority of them would still be running.

Thus ended in failure the schemes of the three conspirators; and for a long time the victory of Timoleonte had a quieting and salutary effect on the whole island of Sicily.

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### AGATHOCLES THE HANDSOME

During a period of twenty years or more after the death of Timoleonte peace and prosperity flirted with liberty in the land of Sicily. I say *flirted* because there was neither betrothal nor marriage. Pernicious agitators arose in various parts of the island to disturb its equanimity. And then a master-scamp with a brilliant mind, in the handsome person of Agathocles, by the force of his evil genius, suc-

## *History and Tradition*

ceeded in making himself over-lord of Syracuse.

Murder, perjury and cunning were the sharp tools of his nimble brain; and no known forms of violence were neglected as means to his vicious ends. Many cities bent under his sway; but Taormina and Messina remained obdurate and defiant. Other methods failing to reduce their pride, he resorted to a Machiavellian policy, and feigned friendship. To these advances Taormina yielded in true Sicilian innocence. At an opportune moment, he cast all semblance of honor to the winds, massacred over six hundred of the leading citizens who, mistrusting, had opposed him. Thus he obtained by the basest of means what he could not win by honest warfare.

Now were the Taorminians securely fettered. The servitude was sore indeed to a people of their spirit. Timeo, the historian, and many other noble citizens went

## *Agathocles the Handsome*

into exile rather than submit to such ghastly humiliation. Melancholy days fell upon the City of the Mount as a pall dropped by the hands of Fate.

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Fortunately in this world, death and rain fall alike on the just and the unjust. Agathocles went the way of all immortals; and after his death three men arose claiming the right to rule over the city. These were Tindarione, the legitimate Prince of Taormina, and the two would-be usurpers Finzia Agrigente and Icta of Syracuse.

While the strife was on between the three contestants, and when general dissension was at flood-tide, the Carthaginians began war on the cities of the coast, hoping to conquer all Sicily. Many cities did fall into the hands of the invaders; and the most optimistic Sicilians were over-shadowed with gloom.

At this dark hour Pirro, King of Epiro,

## *History and Tradition*

son-in-law of the late Agathocles, answered the call of Sicily, and joined his forces with those of Tindarione. The combined armies moved on Catania. Tindarione, commanding the advance division, gave battle to the Carthaginians whom he defeated in every engagement and whom he compelled to sue for peace. His brilliant victories rendered him popular at home and famous abroad. He was now to all purposes the king of Sicily, and retained his power and acclaim until he failed in the siege of Lilibeo, when he lost both. Such is the instability of glory founded on the force of arms. It is as a house builded on shifting sands.

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### THE FIRST PUNIC WAR

Rapid action was the key-note of history-making in those early days. Along came the First Punic War. The changes in Sicily were swift and continuous, espe-

## *The First Punic War*

cially after the departure of King Pirro for his own country. The armies of Sicily had become divided. The spirit of civic homogeneity had fled, and the policy of co-operation between cities gave way to the powers of jealous intrigue and envious contention. Several cities offered their support to Gerone of Syracuse; others to the Carthaginians. Some went over to Messina, and many dedicated themselves to the fortunes of Rome. There remained a few cities however that were still jealous of their liberty, and great enough of civic conscience to scorn all thought of a protectorate. But these were relatively weak, and in a hopeless minority; there was no neighborly response to their noble sentiment eloquently expressed. And so they held aloof awaiting the time with haughty resignation when they must inevitably fall into the hands of the victors, whoever they might be.

Messina alone seemed made of sterner

## *History and Tradition*

stuff. She was militant, and she became threatening. She, too, aspired to become mistress of Sicily. With fervor she fell first upon Taormina, and captured it. In quick succession neighboring cities were subdued. An unbroken series of victories encouraged her to fall into a Napoleonic malady, i. e., to feel in accord with Fate. Then she attacked Catania, but with an eye on Syracuse. This was suspected by Prince Gerone who struck her advancing forces suddenly and with unexpected fury. He defeated them successively in several severe battles, and then before they could recover made a forced march on Messina, and laid siege to the town.

The now thoroughly demoralized Messinians appealed to the Carthaginians for assistance. Hannibal, who was in the vicinity of Lipari, at once set sail for the beleaguered city, but for some reason as mysterious as it was unexpected, he changed his plans and attacked his Messin-

## *The First Punic War*

ian allies. This spread terror among the Messinians, and in their extremity they sent ambassadors to Rome praying for protection.

This swift turn of front astonished even the stolidest of the Romans. Would it be honorable to their arms, they asked themselves, to help a people so fickle and of such feeble courage? Their sense of “honor” to their arms, however, was easily offset by the advantages to be gained in the acquisition of a city so favorably situated as Messina. It was the key perhaps to all Sicily. In any event, it was extremely advisable, for military reasons, to check the advance of Carthaginian power in that island.

This being clear to the Romans, Consul Appius Claudius was sent to oppose Hannibal and Gerone. Within two days after he had entered the port of Messina, he had scattered the Syracusan and Carthaginian forces, made prisoners of many,

## *History and Tradition*

and taken much rich booty for which he had a hawk's sharp eye as well as for beauty.

The news of this victory whetted the appetite of Rome for the whole island. And it was this already prodigious gluttony that finally killed Rome, and reduced her merely to a habitation of the Popes.

In about twelve months Marcus Valerius was sent with heavy forces to Sicily. The moral suasion of his presence at the head of a powerful army inclined Taormina to discretion rather than to valor. Thereupon she proposed a real modern *entente cordiale*, such as we read about today in our newspapers, which was wholly agreeable to Valerius. Catania together with several other cities, which really desired to league with Gerone and the Carthaginians, were now forced by circumstance into diplomatic alliance with Rome. Thus we see that the wonders of

## *The First Punic War*

“statesmanship” were already at that time in full swing.

“Fifty-two cities now freely offered themselves to the Romans. Appius Claudius conquered the Africans and Gerone, King of Sicily. The following year Marcus Valerius and Cajo Ottacilio being Consuls, Taormina, Catania and fifty other cities were received into their friendship.”

*Entropio.*

Gerone’s position was steadily becoming more precarious. He was statesman enough to see that the safest course for him to take was that which soonest led to peace with Rome. This policy which was promptly put into effect, so strengthened his position that he could indulge somewhat in the pleasant pastime of taking revenge on his enemies. Besides, for his services to Rome, seven cities were returned to him, Taormina among the rest, which once had been subject to his rule.

Taormina and the Syracusan Principality through their faithfulness to Rome now

## *History and Tradition*

enjoyed a period of peace, while the other provinces and cities of Sicily were disturbed by war. But finally, when Roman arms vanquished those of Carthage at the battle of Egadi, Sicily threw off the African yoke and donned the purple of prosperity, putting on the fine linen of peace under the enlightened rule of Rome. And Taormina won in due time the distinction of being one of three Sicilian cities with privileges of a “civitas fœderata.”

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### THE SECOND PUNIC WAR

Sicily's new era of joyful peace soon came to an end with the advent of the Second Punic War. This was shorter and more terrible than the first. Still Taormina and her sister cities, subject to Gerone, were secure, and had been relatively tranquil during the long reign of this Prince whose fealty to Rome, once

## *The Second Punic War*

given, was never questioned. At his death, however, he was succeeded by his nephew Geronnio, a boy of fifteen — both stripling and weakling — who proceeded at once under misguidance to break both faith and ties with the Romans, and to court favor with Hannibal. This resulted disastrously. But Taormina remained true to Rome and thereby not only maintained her honor, but raised her hand against a second curse of Carthaginian misrule. Thus saith the poet Silio Italico:

“. . . . . é queri che dal soggiorno  
Di Taormina scorgono Caribdi,  
Che nei vortici suvi sorbendo ingoia  
I travolti navigli, ch' indi a poco  
Dall' inno fondo ricaccia alle stelle.”

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. . . . . and those who from the town  
Of Taormina perceive Caribdi,  
Who in her whirlpools draws and swallows  
Tossed ships, which after a while  
From the deep bottom she throws up to the  
stars.

## *History and Tradition*

Under this beneficent alliance Taormina gained greater freedom than she had attained under Gerone during the First Punic War. For Taormina, like Messina, had now become a confederate city, rich in revenues, with a constitution of its own making, and subject only to military, not to a monetary tribute.

This happy state of affairs seemed to arouse the envy and greed of the rapacious Verres, then Praetor in Sicily, who imposed unjust taxation on Taormina while lessening that of Messina. This violation of treaty and outrage of justice angered the Taorminians to such a pitch that they overthrew the statue of the Roman magistrate. Cicero in his “Verrine” refers to this incident lightly, and goes on to say that the statue was mutilated merely to show contempt for the perjurer, while its base was unharmed, to intimate that peace could be renewed. One is not surprised

## *Uprising of the Serfs*

to observe how subtle was the reasoning of this eloquent pleader.

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### UPRISING OF THE SERFS

The Third Punic War settled Carthage; that is to say, disrupted her power and destroyed her hope. Sicily feared Africa no more. Peace and material abundance blessed the upper classes. But affairs were not so rosy for the serfs. They were a numerous lot of *human beings* who had become tired — weary of thankless toil and oppression — tired of producing wealth for lazy snobs called lords. Therefore they arose in the protest called *rebellion*. Their demands were frightfully unreasonable to those accustomed to rule — to live off the unpaid labor of others. They wished to suppress servitude — to do away with landed estates and proprietorship in human flesh;

## *History and Tradition*

they asked for equal rights and equal opportunities for all who were willing to work. And when we think of those times — of encastled dungeons — of paid torturers — of hired murderers — of religious maniacs — all countenanced by “divine” authority, with all their forces directed against the natural freedom of speech, thought and act, we can realize how audacious seemed the aspirations of these poor slaves. But they still believed in Kings — an absurdity so great that it might almost be called superhuman asinity. Accordingly they elected the Syrian “wizard” Eunus their king, afterward called Antiochus.

This new king has rather a poor reputation in history. But then most history is written by the “upper classes”— those who believe in caste. This accounts for much of its biliaryness — its strabismus, moral obliquity and fatty wit. I confess that history is little better when written

## *Uprising of the Serfs*

by the “lower classes,” although they seem to be adepts at making it. But no matter about that.

The new king was decent enough to be consistent. He did not forget that his power came from the Serfs — the people. He was loyal to his “subjects”— mindful of his obligations — and therefore not very friendly toward the “lords.” “Cunning” and “audacious” he was no doubt, in that he was superior to the general run of stupid folk called kings. If it is true that he was “capable of any crime,” he merely showed that he had royal qualifications. If he was “implacable against the lords,” he displayed firmness and common sense. At all events, he was no jester when he set out to change things in Sicily; and he nearly succeeded. During the two years from 134 to 132 b.c. he invaded several cities with an army of forty thousand poorly equipped infantry. Of course he could not do this without raising some dust

## *History and Tradition*

to settle on the washings of the nobles. His soldiers trampled fastidiously cropped lawns, and were no more polite to women than the soldiery of kings by “divine right.”

He attacked Taormina with admirable determination and judgment, it seems, because, despite Roman arms and the city’s wonderful natural fortifications, he took the town as easily as though General Quinto Fabrio were asleep. After taking it he was diligent in defending his position.

Consul Rupilius who came to “chastise the insolent slaves” remained to starve them into submission, which task he also found to be fraught with some difficulty and delay. For Diodorus says in part, that when the besieged had exhausted all their provisions, they first kissed and then dined upon their women and children. When these supplies ran short, the men ate one another rather than be eaten by

## *Uprising of the Serfs*

the enemy. If one must furnish a steak from his own loins, it is better to feed a friend with it than a foe. The reasoning was good and the sentiment commendable even if stern and a trifle shocking to us of a later day.

Neither this nor any other extreme misery could compel them to lay down their arms and submit to the savagery of the Roman army outside their walls. But they encouraged one another with blood-curdling vows to accept a hundred deaths fighting for liberty, rather than one at the hands of the Romans.

This heroism perhaps was never surpassed by human beings at any time in the sad history of the race. And when the city did fall it was through the infamy of a traitor, and not through any lack of courage or self-sacrifice on the part of the noblest race of serfs that ever dared to raise their heads as men.

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## *History and Tradition*

Marc Antony, Octavius and Lepidus had divided the Roman Empire among themselves much as our own financial magnates “cut a melon.” Sextus Pompey was not pleased with nothing as his share of the graft. So he put himself at the head of an army and made common cause with Brutus and Cassius, whose inspirations came from a higher source.

The combined forces conquered Sardinia and blockaded the coast cities of Sicily. The usual terrors of war were visited upon the Sicilians who, like the Irishman in the story, had almost become used to hanging. Massacre and pillage were common daily occurrences. Misery stalked on land and piracy infested the sea.

Rome awoke to the state of affairs and sent Octavius against Pompey. A hard-fought naval battle took place below Taormina, and Octavius won. Thereupon he demanded the surrender of Taor-

## *Naval Battles*

mina. The Taorminians, ignorant of Pompey's defeat, declined the invitation of the ambassadors, whereupon Octavius attacked their city with such fury and grim menace that messengers were sent to Messina imploring Pompey for aid.

He responded by setting sail at once with a second fleet as strong as the first, and with it engaged the unsuspecting enemy in the harbor of Taormina. The fortunes of battle were favorable to him, for he not only captured many ships, but obliged Octavius to seek personal refuge on the continent.

Very soon however it was Octavius' turn to do the unexpected. He surprised Pompey in the waters of Lipari and Milazzo, and with a new navy engaged him in battle for the third time. Number *three* brought luck to Octavius. Pompey lost several ships, and many of his men were made prisoners. Thus vanquished, he sailed for Africa. Taormina had been

## *History and Tradition*

one of his chief strongholds. Octavius now turned his wrath upon the Taorminians, whom he exiled; and in their stead he planted a Roman colony. Pliny in his *History* names the places to which these poor exiles were sent.

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### THE SARACEN INVASION

The invasion of Sicily by the Saracens came about through a romance. One might say, it began in comedy and passed into fifty years of tragedy. Just how the love of Eufemio for the beautiful Omonizza precipitated Saracen wrath upon the heads of Sicilian Christians is a fascinating story; but it is one that would lead us far afield from Taormina.

Suffice it to say, that the scimitar and flame became active all over the island. Only two cities resisted them to any purpose: Taormina and Syracuse. But after ten months' courageous resistance

## *The Saracen Invasion*

and dogged onslaught, Syracuse gave way and succumbed to the symbol of the crescent. The cross on “Mount Tauro” stood twenty-one years longer.

Eighteen years after the fall of Syracuse, in the reign of Leon VI, the Saracens laid siege to Taormina in dead earnest. For three years it was carried on; and for three years the sign of the cross was a symbol of unshaken courage. The assaults failed. The besieged found means of obtaining provisions, and, occasionally, of small reinforcements of fighting-men. At last Craft was pitted against Courage, and nearly won. Craft is serpentine and wise in all the ways of infamous cunning; while Courage stands in the open with buckler and shield of faith and honor, scorning all other save manly methods of battle.

Craft then had bribed the Greek guards to admit the foe. All the plans had been skilfully laid, and the enemy was already

## *History and Tradition*

advancing when the Rev. Gregorio Cerameo, the vigilant pastor and beloved shepherd of his mountain flock, discovered the plot, saw the extremity, warned the people, and saved the city. The incident is casually referred to in one of his homilies at a public reunion.

Seeming success, swiftly turned into certain failure, had an unpleasant effect on the temper of the Saracen chief. To vent his rage, which knew no bounds, he now began to scour the surrounding country, burning, murdering and resorting to every kind of devilment imaginable to a devout Mussulman chief. And the devilment that does not occur to the mind of a religious fanatic is not worth mentioning.

This particular gentleman was not lacking in imagination. His hatred of Taormina had become more than fanatical — it was personal — and it burned that poor little thing within him which he called his soul. To add to his chagrin, he felt dis-

## *The Saracen Invasion*

graced in the sight of Allah. The sign of the cross infuriated him. He could not endure the thought that this one city alone in all Sicily was able to resist the hosts of the “real God.” Unless his beloved half-moon should rise above the ramparts on the hill where now stood the cross, he should neither be able to rest in his grave, nor ascend to heaven where the perfect happiness of his harem only awaited his coming.

He summoned large reinforcements and baited the enormous cupidity of his Ethiopian hordes with glowing promises of rich lootage. For his own part, he would be content if the scimitar could cut down the cross, and thus efface the seat of government representing an empire. Accordingly, he renewed his attack more ferociously than ever.

At that time Taormina was governed by Costantino Patrizio, a valiant and sagacious man. He had repaired the fortress

## *History and Tradition*

on Mola, and used every means in his power to strengthen his position; but his number of fighting-men had been depleted, and his resources were low. Nevertheless, every citizen able to bear arms resisted desperately the awesome advance of the enemy; and great numbers of them were cut down by the cross-hilted swords. Blood of Christian and Saracen mingled in turbulent streams, making the great hills red.

Hamed saw his army losing ground. Again he courted Craft, and this time Craft mastered Courage. In the night traitorous guards opened the gate which is still called “Porta dei Saraceni.” The city was betrayed by Greek and Roman soldiers — mercenary wretches — the very protagonists of the despised Hessians who annoyed General Washington in the days of his greatest military activities. Inward poured the fierce hordes of Arabs. Nothing was now left the Taorminians

## *The Saracen Invasion*

except to kill the traitors and die like Christian gentlemen — which indeed they did.

The carnage which followed beggars description. The narrow streets ran with blood; age nor sex was spared; buildings were burned and monuments destroyed in an effort to wipe out all traces of Taormina's power and glory.

Even this did not satisfy Saracen savagery. The Taorminians who had escaped into the country among the hills and in the gorges were hunted like wild beasts. The good bishop Procopio and a few followers had taken refuge in a cave where they were discovered, and dragged forth more dead than alive before the ruthless Hamed. He ordered that their hearts should be cut out while still beating, and that their bodies be burned as a warning to those who durst oppose his royal will. He was one of the greatest religionists in history. An old MS. says:

## *History and Tradition*

“Thus Taormina, the last rampart of Sicilian greatness fell into the hands of the Saracens on Christmas day 965,\* and its name till then so glorious, was changed by the Mussulmans to ‘Al-Moezzia’, in honor of the Caliph Al-Moezz, who had come to the timely aid of the Emir Hamed, conqueror of the heroic city.”

End of the first Saracen invasion.

### TAORMINA RETAKEN

The Taorminian Christian was hard to kill and harder to keep dead. He was so much like the phœnix that he could rise from his own ashes; and he improved on the characteristics of that wonderful bird by arising red-hot for a fight. The Christian spirit in Taormina never seemed to bear any rational relation to the number of Christians left alive by the Saracens. This spirit became prodigious after most of the Christians had been murdered. Bishop Gregorio Cerameo, took advan-

\* Other authorities give the date as 902.

## *Taormina Retaken*

tage of this miraculous fact and exhorted the few Christians left alive to buckle on their spiritual arms and throw off the Saracen yoke.

The city guard had become greatly diminished, and was easily overcome; walls were hastily repaired, fortresses restored, and an appeal sent to Constantino VI, Emperor of the East, for assistance. This mighty potentate, however, being little more than a puling babe-in-arms, the Queen Regent and her Counsellors acted in his stead. That is to say, they decided not to act at all. The Mussulman power was not to be disturbed while a revolution was shaking the very walls of Constantinople. They did deign however to ask the good offices of Eustrozio, Governor of Calabria, to bring about peace with the Saracens. And this he succeeded in doing. A treaty was made, and it was stipulated that in consideration of an annual tribute paid to the Mussulmans,

## *History and Tradition*

Taormina and the neighboring towns should belong to the Emperor of the East; and being his property, they should be immune from further annoyance. The treaty was signed in 919, and peace lasted for forty-two years.

At the expiration of this time the Arabs again attacked Taormina. It had become a sort of Saracen habit of mind to hate and a habit of arms to attack this town. African reinforcements arrived in August, and a few months later the city fell again into “infidel hands.” An anonymous author, referred to heretofore, says, moreover, that 1750 Taorminians on this occasion were exiled to the African domains of his majesty, King Amuezzo. This statement is corroborated by a homily of Gregorio Cerameo who says that Taormina fell in 919.

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## *Taormina Falls for the Third Time*

### TAORMINA FALLS FOR THE THIRD TIME

Now Constantinople had fallen to the power of Emperor Riceforo Foca, who in 965 invaded Sicily with an army commanded by the brilliant but rash young Emanuel. Taormina was taken first as it had the hardest reputation. Then followed the fall of Syracuse, Imera and Lentini. Then Emanuel, with the splendid dash of youth in his blood and with the flush of victory still on his beardless cheeks, proceeded to attack the Emir Hasan who was then occupied with the siege of Rametta.

At the approach of Emanuel's troops the Saracen general hastened to occupy the passes, and was enabled by means of his strategic position to cut up the advanced division, at the head of which bravely fighting, young Emanuel fell. His rashness and scorn of cooler counsel not only cost him his life, but the demoral-

## *History and Tradition*

ization of his troops. His army was quickly routed and the Saracens were very soon again laying siege to Taormina.

The Christians quickly formed a legion and defended their city with much of their old-time bravery. After five months their provisions were exhausted, and for the third time Taormina fell into the bloody hands of the Saracens, who again proceeded, as was their wont, to cut throats and burn buildings, as we are told in the writings of Pagio and Caruso.

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### CAPTAIN ROGER AND THE NORMANS

The Saracens now held sway over all Sicily; and no nation was inclined to dispute their authority. They had provided for the solidarity of government by establishing governors in the five cities of Palermo, Messina, Syracuse, Trapani and Taormina. But just when their power was at its height and seemed so securely

## *Captain Roger and the Normans*

intrenched that it was impregnable, an intrepid band of warriors landed in Sicily.

These were the Normans, and Count Roger was their Captain. City and town, one after another, fell before their sturdy advance. Possessing themselves of Val di Demona they proceeded to Taormina where the Saracens, protected by stupendous natural and strong artificial fortifications, resisted their advance for seventeen years after the fall of Messina.

Captain Roger realized that Taormina was the keystone of Saracen support and power. His military judgment told him how unwise it would be to penetrate a hostile country leaving behind him an army of the enemy thus fortified. Therefore, in February 1078 he began siege by cutting twenty-two trenches around the city, and blockading the port with his fleet.

During this time Count Roger seemed ubiquitous. He made personal inspection of the work of his engineers by day and

## *History and Tradition*

by night, usually going about unattended. One day it so happened, we are told, that while he was examining the fortifications alone, a band of Saracens, who had lain concealed behind a hedge of myrtle, leaped forth and showered him with arrows and other missiles. Being unarmed and outnumbered, as it were, his only chance lay in flight — and that was slim. At the critical moment a powerful Briton named Evisandro threw himself upon the foe, drawing their fire, and died to save the life of his beloved Count. The hero's body was stuck so full of arrows, it is said, that from a short distance he resembled a large porcupine more than a man. His act of heroism was celebrated with solemn obsequies, and the whole army mourned his loss.

During the rites for the repose of his soul, fourteen ships were seen approaching the harbor. They had been sent by the King of Tunis to aid the Saracens by

## *Captain Roger and the Normans*

breaking the blockade of the port of Taormina. Just then a high wind arose, and scattered the ships like autumn leaves. With the disruption of this fleet perished all Saracen hopes of relief. As the lines tightened about the city, hunger was gnawing at its vitals. And in August 1078, after a rule of one hundred and nine years, the Saracens were forced to surrender, and their power in Sicily fell.

Throughout the Saracen occupancy Taormina had been under the Patriarchal Jurisdiction of Constantinople; and at this time Teofane Ceremeo was archbishop. But after the Norman conquest this See, being almost depopulated, was annexed to that of Tronia, newly made by Count Roger, the conqueror.

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Count Roger was succeeded by his son William I; and at the death of William I the throne of Sicily passed to his son, Wil-

## *History and Tradition*

liam II. At his accession, William II was a child, and Margherita, his mother, was made Regent.

The Queen-Mother summoned her kinsman Stefano Percese from France, whom she made Chancellor. This nearly precipitated a rebellion through jealousy; and affairs became so threatening that the Queen with the infant King and her Chancellor abandoned Palermo November 15, 1169, and sought refuge in Messina. Scarcely had they arrived there when more trouble greeted the unhappy Queen and her chief officer. Richard, Count of Molise and Errico di Canosa, the Queen's brother, being jealous of the Chancellor's power and influence with the Regent, conspired to murder him. The plot was discovered, however, and Richard was imprisoned in the Castle of Taormina. Whereupon the Court returned to Palermo.

Ottone Quarel who came from France with Percese remained in Messina. He

## *Captain Roger and the Normans*

had had enough of high-life in Sicily, and wished to return to his own land. He was an inoffensive man whose only great sin was in his associations with Royalty. As soon as it was noised about that he was preparing to sail for France, the waggish element of the populace decided to make him the central character in some horse-play. With this end in view they laid hold of him, stripped him naked, tied him on the back of a donkey in the most shameful position, and led the donkey about through the streets, provoking boisterous amusement and riotous acts. The mob finally maltreated the poor chap so cruelly that he died. Thereupon the murder so stimulated the popular thirst for more blood that the city arose against the Royal Army, took Rametta by storm and then marched on Taormina.

Now outwardly, at least, the Taorminians were loyal subjects; but no great resistance was made against the Messinians,

## *History and Tradition*

who easily took the town — their purpose being principally to Free Richard, who was imprisoned in the fortress and guarded by the Prefect Matteo.

### THE HEROIC MATTEO

However mistaken this man Matteo may have been in the ethics of the situation, he stands out boldly nevertheless in history as one of the most exalted examples of faithfulness to duty, as he conceived it, of nobility of attitude and of unflinching courage, that the world has ever seen. He could not be tempted with gold or promises of power, nor intimidated with menace, nor frightened by any threat. The insurgents thinking that like most brave men he might yield to save those whom he loved from torture, while remaining steadfast in the teeth of personal oppression or death, decided to imprison his wife and children in Messina unless he immediately released Count

## *The Heroic Matteo*

Richard. The Queen's brother delivered this alternative to him in person.

Matteo listened with patience and dignified respect. At last with head bowed to the inexpressible sadness of a fate too cruel for words, he replied: "Sire, it seems to me that you appreciate too lightly the zeal of an honest man who knows neither how to be disloyal to his King nor to deny his oath. My wife and children would justly look upon me with contempt if I broke my word and turned traitor to my country. Let the Messinians shed the blood of the innocent if they must. As husband and father I shall mourn their loss; but as citizen of Taormina my heart shall know no remorse. Please leave me!" and with head still bowed he waved Errico away. It was apparent to all that nothing could shake the constancy of this noble citizen. Other means must be found — and they were.

One of Matteo's assistants was a man

## *History and Tradition*

named Gavarretto, of easy morals, agreeable to almost any kind of seduction, if the word may be applied to one so willing. Errico easily arranged with him to open the Count's cell while Matteo slept. And while he was doing this, some slight noise awakened the Prefect who drew his sword, but too late. The infamous Gavarretto, over-eager for his reward, struck the illustrious citizen down, and he died bleeding from many wounds. This act which gave to Messina both the worthless Richard and the fortress of Taormina was, says Francesco Strada in his *L'Aguila Trionfante*, the death-blow to the glory of Taormina.

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King William II, called the Good, left no known heirs, although it is said that the usual crop of “widows” came forward eager to present their fruit to the throne. At his death Tancred, natural son of the

## **Tancred**

Norman Count Roger, was elected to the succession. Shortly after his accession to the throne he was visited by King Richard of England whom he received at Catania and accompanied to Taormina. There the two monarchs gossiped a good deal, and indulged in the usual pastime of kings of the epoch. They reared many stately palaces in air, carried on imaginary campaigns of great glory — all which came to nothing more than the spent fumes of the grape.

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The end of Norman rule in Sicily came one hundred and thirty-five years after the landing of Captain Count Roger. With the end of the Norman line began a period of bloodshed and strife all over the island. Arrigo VI, Emperor of Germany, succeeded Tancred, the last Norman King of Sicily. Arrigo was the husband of Constance, a descendant of Roger.

## *History and Tradition*

At the death of Arrigo, the only son of Constance, known in history as Frederick the Great, succeeded to the title, but was much too occupied at home to bother with a little Sicilian throne. This he nonchalantly passed over to Corrado, the father-in-law of his natural son Manfred, Prince of Taranto.

The reign of Corrado was cut short by poison, and in his absence the young Corradino from Germany was called to the throne. This was considered an impolitic insult by the young Manfred. And he resented it by heading a rebellion, and proclaiming himself King.

As described by Maurolico, this son of the great Frederick “was handsome in person, daring in enterprise, jealous of the interests of Sicily and unscrupulous enough to be every inch a King.” His “natural” traits and abilities as easily made him a popular idol as his wisdom made him a

## *Manfred*

successful leader. Indeed, he was soon hailed by the people as the only hope of the country, which he took no pains to dispute, especially since he had spread the report that Corradino had died.

Messina however did not take kindly to his rule, and decided to dispose of his person by fair means or foul — she was not at all particular which. In this enterprise she sought Taormina as an accomplice.

But Taormina was traditionally loyal. Moreover she was greatly fond of the gallant Manfred, and declined the secret overtures of Messina. This refusal so enraged the fiery Messinians that they made war on Taormina, and having a large army were able to take it. Then they imitated their Saracen predecessors in their attempts to wipe Taormina out of existence — and almost succeeded.

A Dominican Prior, named Corrado, in a letter to the Bishop of Catania, says that

## *History and Tradition*

this took place in the year of 1270. His letter is dated April 1, of the same year.

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Manfred died at Benevento on the 27th of February, 1266, four years after the Messinians took and pillaged Taormina. This dashing prince had not been very popular with the popes. Both Urban IV and Clement IV had conspired against him with Charles of Anjou. And now at his death, Sicily was given over to Charles.

At this juncture Corradino arose to dispute for the kingdom he had lost to Manfred. Forthwith he crossed the Alps with his army, and was welcomed by the citizens of Palermo, Messina and Syracuse. But before he could join any decisive issue with his foe he fell dead. This occurred while he was making a speech in a public square at Naples on the 29th of October in the year 1268. God had a good way of silencing the early orator.

## *Charles of Anjou*

Charles of Anjou now virtually had no opposition. He began his reign very unwisely, and rather arrogantly even for a King in those ungodly days. He burdened his subjects with unjust and heavy taxes, and at the same time took away from them many of their ancient privileges. Not content with this, he freely exiled or put to death any natives who were bold enough to protest. And as a final act of infamy turned his French soldiers loose upon the native women with the King's license to work their will. This was a little too much for the Sicilians. For if anything will stir up the boiling wrath of a real Sicilian it is to take liberties with his woman. He may be perfectly willing to whip her himself, but he is ready to murder the man who would so much as kiss her cheek.

A few good men, such as Bartholomeo the Bishop of Patti, believed or affected to believe that Charles was ignorant of

## *History and Tradition*

the infamous acts committed in his name. The Bishop was chosen therefore to acquaint the King with the true state of affairs, and failing in this, then to lay the matter before the Holy Father. “But,” to use the Bishop’s own words as quoted by Malispina in his VI Book, “they were words scattered to the wind; for Charles heeded not the Bishop and derided the admonition of the Pope.”

### “THE SICILIAN VESPERS”

By this time Sicilian anger had spread like a flame over the whole island. It was decided on March 31st, 1282, to exterminate the French. At an appointed time Palermo set off the signal which was taken up by the other cities and towns. The massacre began while the French were mostly at Church singing the Vespers; for they were better Catholics in those days than in ours. No quarter nor any pity was shown; they were cut down like grass

## *“The Sicilian Vespers”*

in the very Temples of the Lord. This massacre, thenceforward, was ironically called “The Sicilian Vespers.”

Meanwhile the Taorminians had been a little remiss in the murdering which they were expected to do as their share of the work. There was something in the air on Mount Tauro which caused them to sympathize for a moment with the French sentiment for their women. And not until five hundred French archers and cavalrymen arrived from Catania under command of Michelotto Gata, sent to check this mild outburst of Sicilian impetuosity, did the Taorminians come to a realization of their Southern duty toward the “unwritten law.” But when they did come to their senses, it was with a vengeance. The spirit of extermination and revenge possessed them as fully as it had their brothers in other parts of the island. Agreeably to this spirit all the French in town were murdered, and Michelotto was

## *History and Tradition*

pursued to the Castle of Calascitta whence he and a few of his remaining horsemen had taken refuge. There they met the same tragic end. (Fazzello's *De Rebus Siculis.*)

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Taormina was again free from foreign tyranny. Once more she could breathe deeply; once more she could look upon the inspiring hills and blue sea with some sort of poetic pleasure. Peter of Aragon had become the new King of Sicily. Under his short reign peace smiled upon this turbulent people.

At the death of Peter his son James succeeded him, who was crowned at Palermo according to an ancient custom. Thence he proceeded to Messina to meet Queen Constance, his children and Roger di Loria who had just arrived from Spain.

After a short stay at Messina the King set out for Catania escorted by four hun-

## *King James*

dred Taorminian cavalrymen. En route he received news of the approach of eighty-four French ships. In the face of this new danger the cities of the island rallied around their King, and succeeded in routing the enemy. Maurolico relates that the “three-oared ships” of the Taorminians were brilliantly successful in battle, and that they captured several ships of the enemy.

\* \* \*

James formed an alliance with Boniface VIII, and abdicated in favor of Charles II. This was far from being agreeable to the Sicilian barons, who had had already considerable experience with the French. Thereupon they proclaimed Frederick, the third son of Peter, King of Sicily; and crowned him at Palermo on Easter Sunday, 1296.

Frederick was more than a mediocre fighting-prince. He had won victories in

## *History and Tradition*

Calabria and elsewhere. So when he visited Taormina, shortly after he had been made King, his fame had preceded him, and he was given more than a “royal” reception — it was a rousing welcome. (Maurolico, *Hist. Bk. IV.*)

Frederick was much pestered by his brother James, who persistently incited the French to harass the coast cities. Their attacks were usually repelled without great damage, and they never gained entrance until Roger di Loria, with the help of traitors, took Taormina, which he proceeded to sack. The city’s treasure however had been hidden among the rocks, much to di Loria’s chagrin, for he had to return empty-handed.

At the death of Frederick the throne went to his son Peter, who ruled more or less decently for sixteen years. In 1342 Peter passed away leaving the kingdom to his infant son Ludovico, who was placed under the special tutelage of his late

## *Ludovico*

father's brother, Duke Giovanni. The Queen-Mother, Elisabetta, being wise among women, soon discovered that the Duke himself had designs on the throne, and therefore she had her son crowned forthwith at Palermo.

At this time the whole island was ravaged with a pest which carried off, among many other estimable folk, the too ambitious Duke Giovanni. But even with his death the world did not stand still, for Belasco Alazone took the Duke's place as tutor *intime* to the youthful king. However Alazone was not a success. He was too warlike and meddlesome; and he soon had the country engaged in civil strife.

Messina, always destined to play tragic rôles, took up arms in favor of one Matteo Polizzi, who aspired to something or other, it mattered little what so long as he could flutter around the edge of the spot-light. The Messinians quickly captured the

## *History and Tradition*

Castle of Mola, and showed much prowess. About this time the Chiaramontani burst forth in rebellion. Nor did these troubles cease during the entire reign of Ludovico. The period was marked with intrigue, bloodshed and general internecine commotion. Through it all however with a singular faithfulness, which for the most part has ever marked her career, Taormina remained loyal to the King.

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Ludovico died in 1355. The youngest son of Peter, the third Frederick, was nicknamed “the Simple” because he was weak minded. On account perhaps of his marked royal fitness he was chosen to succeed Ludovico.

Frederick III was little more than an automaton. In the hands of his sister, Eufemia the Regent, he was an obliging tool. She sent him to Taormina, where he was received with homage, instructed

## *Frederick the Simple*

to convoke a Parliament at Catania to consider terms of peace. But Ludovico's favorite, Belasco, had left an ambitious son called Artole Alagona, who was intriguing with the rebellious Enrico Rosso and his confederate, Francesco Ventimiglia. The upshot of this whole matter was not a Parliament of Peace and the cessation of civil war, but its renewal under blistering conditions.

The enemies of Frederick now incited Luigi of Naples to send his army against Sicily. At the battle of Mascali the Sicilian troops were victorious; and the Taorminians, especially, acquitted themselves by cutting to pieces a division of the Neapolitan forces, and by taking prisoner the great and powerful noble, Raimondo Balzo, whom they locked up in the Castle of Francaville. But eventually an agreement was made whereby the King of Naples exchanged his prisoner, the sister of Frederick, for the great Balzo. This

## *History and Tradition*

was the beginning of peace. A treaty was signed between the two powers; and Taormina remained in possession of the King of Sicily.

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At Messina on the 27th of July 1373, Frederick III passed away leaving an only child, Maria, to inherit the Duchies of Atene and Neopatria, together with the throne of Sicily. This child was under the guardianship of Artale Alazona. As she approached adulthood her career became more and more romantic and checkered. For instance, she was kidnapped by Raimondo Moncada from the Castle of Catania; married to Prince Martin, son of the King of Aragon; achieved a short period of peace for her country, and died in 1401. Her son Frederick, and Martin her Consort, soon followed her. And in 1410 a new rebellion of the Barons was in red flower.

## *Queen Maria*

The affairs of the Government were now so hopelessly complicated and weak that a Parliament was called at Taormina. It failed. Two years later another Parliament held at the same place proclaimed the Infant Ferdinand of Castile, King of Sicily. As Kings go, Ferdinand was a gentleman, and well named the “Just.”

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The good Ferdinand’s reign was short, for he died April 2nd, 1416. His crown descended to his son Alfonso, called the “magnanimous.” Alfonso was succeeded in 1458 by his brother John of Navarre, who in turn left the throne to Ferdinand “the Catholic” in 1479.

The dynasty of Aragon and Castile ran out with the sands of Ferdinand in 1510; “and Sicily passed to Charles, son of Giovanna, the daughter of Ferdinand ‘the Catholic,’ and wife of Philip of Austria.”

## *History and Tradition*

The new king reached Taormina October 20th, 1535, and was well received. As a mark of kingly gratitude for the constant loyalty of Taormina, his majesty sold the city two years later for eighty thousand florins. This was a sad blow to the pride and patriotism of the Taorminians who commenced at once to collect the required amount — and with it bought their freedom.

This gave the King an idea: Why not sell Taormina whenever his exchequer ran low? Good! A decree was issued to the effect that “Taormina the Beautiful,” the seat of ancient power and glory — Taormina the brave, the loyal — was again for sale. But the market had tumbled, as we say, and the bears had an inning. This time only eight thousand florins was asked for the bulls of the hill. The purchaser was one Anthony Balsamo of Messina. Once more the Taorminians raised the money and bought their freedom rather

## *Charles II*

than submit to the disgrace of being sold like cattle or slaves.

Meanwhile revolution succeeded revolution, and the confusion was increased by raiding bands of Spanish soldiers who had escaped from the Goletta. Ferrante Gonzaga, Viceroy, thought it advisable to commission Anthony Balsamo, one-time purchaser of Taormina, to defend her against these Spanish marauders. Thus had the mighty fallen! and thus the strong had become the suppliant weak.

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Emperor Charles of Austria had a conscience, and seemed capable of remorse. At all events, he renounced the pomp of his brilliant Court in 1555 for the simple life of a monastery. Thus Philip II, his son, became King and in effect the Inquisitor of Sicily.

During the reign of Charles II, in 1675 the Messinians were again boiling — for

## *History and Tradition*

the French were upon them. The story of this French invasion is long. Albeit, finally the Messinians joined forces with the French against the rest of the island. The depleted Sicilian troops were commanded by the fearless Carlo Ventimiglia di Prados.

Viscount di Francaville, with the assistance of the Messinians, attacked Taormina; but his forces were repulsed by those of Count di Prados. However, in September of the following year, the French having taken Augusta, the Viceroy Amiello Gusman called on the Taorminian infantry to protect Catania. This left Taormina virtually defenseless. On October 16th, her weakness was forced by four thousand French and five hundred Messinian troops, assisted by twenty-four large ships. The attack was feebly resisted, and Count di Prado tarnished his fame by surrendering too soon. For eight days following, contrary to the

## *18th Century*

terms of the treaty, the city was ravished and pillaged by the invading soldiery. The sad old story of “victory” was once more repeated.

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The beginning of the eighteenth century was a stormy time for all Europe. Sicily passed under the rule of Amedeo of Savoy; and by the heedless policy of Cardinal Alberoni it was turned over to the Spanish. Then Spain, in the guise of friendship, sent a strong army into Sicily under the captaincy of the Marquis de Leyde.

Now Count Marcy at the head of eighteen thousand German soldiers swooped down on Sicily. This frightened the Spaniards who left Milazzo to reinforce Francaville. Marcy set out at once to attack this stronghold. He put his soldiers on their mettle by issuing only three days' rations, telling them that they

## *History and Tradition*

must conquer or die of hunger. Then he discarded all impedimenta, and lightly equipped for rapid marching, soon came up to the Spanish whom he defeated, taking many prisoners. The march was then continued on Francaville. Here the Spanish surprised the Germans with a most stubborn resistance. The three days' rations exhausted, the Teutonic troops were forced to eat the forage carried for the horses. As nothing was ever known to discourage a German stomach, this food was as good as any; spurred on by necessity they fought well.

On the 22d of June, 1719, German ships laden with provisions were seen approaching the shore off Taormina. They were signaled, and landed at Schiso. Food and reinforcements were put ashore; and Francaville soon fell.

A large number of German troops were now drawn up in the valley below Taor-

## *19th Century*

mina. At the sight of them the foreign defenders of the city quailed as no native guard had ever done before. And when the Catania soldiers, commonly called "Inchilotti," deserted to the enemy, the Spanish, without more ado, surrendered to the Germans, who took possession of Taormina on June 25th, 1719.

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century the French invaded Italy. Assisted by the English, Ferdinand IV took refuge in Sicily. Owing to her position and fortifications, Taormina was chosen as headquarters for the Sicilian army. The city also served as a refuge for thousands of undisciplined troops until April, when treason once more opened the gates, this time to the army of the Bourbons.

The Sicilian soldiers withdrew to the hills of Ali, and the defenseless city was

## *History and Tradition*

left to rapine and all manner of shocking brutality known to the *genre* of militant invaders.

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Since that time Taormina has made no history worth recording. All her living interest lies in her matchless beauty.











